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## **ECONOMY**

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Since the 1992 presidential campaign, commentators have almost always summarized the most important election issue as follows: “[It’s the economy, stupid!](#)” But this phrase only seeks to explain *what* is on Americans’ minds; it does not explain the question of *why* the economy is so important. The answer to *why* cannot simply be measured by whether Americans can survive. That would be the equivalent of judging a person’s happiness solely on their physical ability to breathe. Instead, it is measured by whether or not Americans can flourish. How one *flourishes* and what role the economy has in that process are moral questions; ones that biblical principles can answer.

**At a most fundamental level, Christians believe that the Earth belongs to God.** As the Lord said in the days of [Job](#), “[w]hatever is under the whole heaven is mine.” This proclamation isn’t a metaphor. It is a literal, righteous declaration of God’s ownership and authoritative control over everything we label with price tags. As [Haggai 2:8](#) says, “The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the Lord of hosts.” To this day, God provides for his creation. [James 1:17](#) tells us that “[e]very good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” Whether it be in the Lord’s perfect or permissive will, the material bounties of nations and individual persons exist because of Him. One anonymous writer summarized all these verses the following way: “Everything one has is on loan from God.”

In this light, our relationship to God’s created order on Earth resembles the relationship of a [legal trust](#). Christians are the “stewards” of the Earth and everything within it for God’s glory, not its owners. As Jesus explains in the parable of the Talents, those who cultivate what God gives him are the “[good and faithful servants](#)” whom He gives the right to “[e]nter into the joy of [our] master,” the kingdom of Heaven.

When this principle is combined with the understanding that the Kingdom of Heaven is one family in Christ, then the Church should advocate for an economic culture for the flourishing of families. If families thrive, then humanity grows as God commanded in Genesis. If humanity grows, then humanity positions itself to subdue the Earth for God’s glory.

In fact, this economic approach is supported by the very word “economy,” which derives from two [Greek words](#): “oikos,” meaning “household,” and “nemein,” meaning “management.” When combined, these terms form the root word of economy: “oikonomia,” meaning the management of households. The Greek conception of “[economy](#)” developed from its understanding of political communities [“*polis*”], or city-states. In the [Aristotelian tradition](#), societies grew and flourished much like an organism – when its “cells” were well-ordered. Economics was the means by which the “cells” of a society – households – flourished. When those cells thrive, so too does the organism or society as a whole. The Greeks described this state of flourishing as “[eudaimonia](#),” true happiness.

As one political scientist notes, the ancient Greek philosophy believed that “the main task of economic rationality is to advance the good life.” The closest modern American analog to the Greek conception of “household” is the family as God designed. The main task of the Church is



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to advance the Kingdom of Heaven, to declare the good news of the gospel that there is *eternal* life with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, this is not the uniform view of cultural elites in American culture. For instance, in 2023, the multinational technology company Apple announced its “2030” environmental plan with a video titled, “[Mother Nature](#).” In it, Apple’s “board” awaits a meeting with “Mother Nature,” a nature spirit that travels to the company’s headquarters in the wind and leaves. After sitting herself at the head of the board table, Mother Nature says, “This is my third corporate responsibility gig today. So, who wants to disappoint me first?” Employees repeatedly list several acts of devotion to earn her favor—or more specifically to be spared from her wrath—but are chided for speaking out of turn. Minutes go by, and CEO Tim Cook finally pledges that all the company’s products will have a net zero climate impact by 2030. “They better,” Mother Nature says while staring down Cook. “They will,” he responds. To that, Mother Nature spares her wrath, but warns, “Don’t disappoint your mother.”

As well-intentioned as the plan may be, this worldview does not place humanity in the role of steward. It places us in the role of servant whose object of devotion is a false god, one only satisfied by the adequacy of our conduct, not by a heart of love and the fruits thereof. We are God’s servant; we do not belong to the world, but to Him. This is why [Christ says](#), “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

Generosity and charity are the fruits of the faithful who love God, not items within a checklist to perfect ourselves so as to avoid the wrath of a false god. For the Christian virtue of charity to be truly observed, the government must, at times, abstain from using its coercive powers. If on every matter the government compelled charity, then charity would devolve into taxation. In fact, compelled charity is not so charitable at all!

**Scripture also speaks to another economic subject—a balanced budget.** As an ethical matter, balanced budgets cannot be justified by the mere desire to accumulate money. As the apostle Paul writes in [1 Timothy](#), “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.” This verse, often misquoted as “money is the root of all evil” has led to a poor theology of money and wealth. No, it is not the currency in and of itself that is evil. It is the love of money, the idolatry of money, which is admonished by the Scripture.

The pursuit of money for its own sake is to serve [mammon](#), and Christ [makes clear](#) that “[n]o one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”

The Christian conception of balanced budgets is rooted in the spiritual gift of [wisdom](#). In [Ephesians 5](#), the apostle Paul writes, “[l]ook carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.” On an individual level, “wisdom” encompasses the gift of discernment, an understanding to know what is good. [Stoic philosophers](#) viewed wisdom as one of the four cardinal virtues, along with justice, courage, and temperance. The Roman statesman [Cicero](#) believed wisdom was “the foremost of all virtues ... for by [it] ... we understand ... the practical knowledge of things to be sought for and of things to be avoided.” Cicero [even believed](#) wisdom was a spiritual “knowledge of things human and



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divine, which is concerned also with the bonds of union between gods and men and the relations of man to man.”

Biblical wisdom is far superior to even the Stoic and Roman conceptions. [As Jesus said to his apostles](#) forewarning of the persecution and interrogations they would face, “settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for **I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.**”

Proverbs 9:10-12 states “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. For through wisdom your days will be many, and years will be added to your life. If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer.”

On the national level, this includes operating as good stewards within the bounds of money gained through taxation. If the government spends more than what is collected through just taxation, then it either risks the detriment and suffering of its constituents or a national debt to foreign lenders. Although God may use a state of debt to strengthen the nation, it should not be construed as a good in and of itself. Otherwise, the will of temporary regimes can be elevated above the [raison d'être](#) for the [American Republic](#)—“to establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.”

A nation operating with biblical wisdom in the sphere of economics and finance leads to many years and great reward as alluded to in Proverbs. Operating without, makes the nation a slave and debtor.

