

Twelve Principles for a Biblical Worldview on Economics

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Regrettably, many American Christians know little about economics. Furthermore, many Christians assume that the Bible has nothing at all to say about economics. But a biblical worldview actually has a great deal to teach us about economic matters.

The meaning of work, the value of labor and other economic issues are all part of the biblical worldview. At the same time, we must recognize that the Christian worldview does not demand or promote a particular economic system.

Because this is the case, Christians must allow the economic principles found in scripture to shape our thinking while recognizing that we can act in light of those principles in any economic, cultural, or generational setting.

1. A Christian Economic Understanding Has God's Glory as Its Greatest Aim

For Christians, all economic theory begins with an aim to glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31). We have a transcendent economic authority.

2. A Christian Economic Understanding Respects Human Dignity

No matter the belief system, those who work show God's glory, whether they know it or not. People may believe they are working for their own reasons, but they are actually working out of an impulse that was put into their hearts by the Creator for his glory.

3. A Christian Economic Understanding Respects Private Property and Ownership

Some economic systems treat the idea of private property as a problem. But scripture never considers private property as a problem to be solved (see, for instance, the Ten Commandments). Scripture's view of private property implies it is the reward of someone's labor and dominion. The eighth and tenth commandments teach us that we have no right to violate the financial rewards of the diligent.

4. A Christian Economic Understanding Takes into Full Account the Power of Sin

Taking the Bible's teaching on the pervasive effects of sin into full account means that we expect bad things to happen in every economic system. A Christian economic understanding tries to ameliorate the effects of sin.

5. A Christian Economic Understanding Upholds and Rewards Righteousness

Every economic and government system comes with embedded incentives. An example of this is the American tax code, which incentivizes desired economic behaviors. Whether they work or not is an issue of endless political recalibration. However, in the Christian worldview, that recalibration must continue upholding and rewarding righteousness.

6. A Christian Economic Understanding Rewards Initiative, Industry, and Investment

Initiative, industry, and investment are three crucial words for the Christian's economic and theological vocabulary. *Initiative* goes beyond action. It is the kind of action that makes a difference. *Industry* is human work done corporately. *Investment* is part of the respect for private property found in scripture.

Investment, as it turns out, is as old as the Garden of Eden. That which accrues value is honorable, and the impulse to accrue that value is honorable. Thus, a Christian economic theory indicts anyone who will not work, not respect private property, and not reward investment.

7. A Christian Economic Understanding Seeks to Reward and Incentivize Thrift

In a fallen world, money and investments can quickly be distorted to idolatrous ends. For that reason, thrift is an important issue in the Christian worldview. In a fallen world, abundance one day can turn into scarcity the next. Thrift may be what provides survival in times of poverty.

8. A Christian Economic Understanding Upholds the Family as the Most Basic Economic Unit

When thinking about economic theory embedded in the beginning of the Bible, the dominion mandate is central, but so is the divine institution of marriage. The pattern of leaving and cleaving described in Genesis 2 is fundamental to our economic understanding. Adam and Eve were the first economic unit. The result is that the family (biblically defined) is the most basic and essential unit of the economy.

9. A Christian Economic Understanding Must Respect Community

Most secular thinkers and economists begin with the community and then move to the family. However, thinking from larger to smaller economic units does not work in theory and fails in practice. Beginning with the family unit and then working out toward the community is a much smarter option. The doctrine of subsidiarity—which emerged out of natural law theory—teaches that meaning, truth, and authority reside in the smallest meaningful unit possible.

If the family unit is deficient, no government can meet the need of its citizens. When the family is strong, government can be small. When the family is weak, however, the government must compensate for the loss. By focusing on the family, we respect and better the community.

10. A Christian Economic Understanding Rewards Generosity and Proper Stewardship

Christians who are committed to the economics of the kingdom and to the good of the next generation must live with a future-oriented financial perspective. We each have the responsibility, whether a lot or a little, to see that our generosity endures far beyond our life spans. Spiritual generosity, which is so clear in scripture, is essential to a Christian economic worldview.

11. A Christian Economic Understanding Respects the Priority of the Church and Its Mission

Christians must embrace economic priorities that the rest of the world will not simply understand. Christians must invest in churches, seminaries, and international missions. These are distinctive Christian financial commitments. Our ultimate financial commitment is not to ourselves or to our own investments but to the Kingdom of Christ. Thus, Christians should always be ready to experience upheaval in economic priorities and arrangements because urgent kingdom issues can intervene at any moment.

12. A Christian Economic Understanding Focuses on Eschatological Judgment and Eschatological Promise

This life and its resources cannot deliver ultimate joy. The Christian worldview reminds us that we must live with the recognition that we will give an account to our Lord for our stewardship of our resources. At the same time, Christians must look to the eschatological promise of the New Heavens and New Earth as our ultimate economic hope. We must lay up treasures in heaven and not on earth.