

Conditions For Wealth

A Little Bit of History

Introduction

■ Upcoming installments:

- Is there a Christian view of money and wealth?
- If there is a biblical view, then how does it concern the way in which we *create, care for, invest, and spend* wealth?
- Nobody knows the future except God Almighty
- Wealth is not something to be despised, but something the godly Christian should seek for extending the kingdom of God.

Introduction

- Our relationship with Christ involves every aspect of our lives; including the way in which we deal with money.
 - The choices we make arise from our allegiances:
 - Pirated software or other copyright issues
 - Faithfulness in contracts
 - Training our children
 - Our choices must be made based upon a right understanding of God's moral law.

Introduction

- Many Christians today have an ambivalent view toward money and wealth
 - “Too much wealth is wrong”
 - “We should not be pursuing wealth”
 - “True spirituality has nothing to do with wealth”
- This teaching is only partly true at best
- Taken by itself this view constitutes a wrong view of wealth and a wrong view of man’s purpose on earth.

Introduction

- It is wrong to make money and wealth our primary purpose in life or our greatest good.
- But, when our goal is God's glory, then the pursuit of wealth *as a necessary means to finance that endeavor* is a noble and worthy task.
 - Note, the kingdom of God is not blessed or extended by poverty.
 - At the same time as we are warned against pursuing wealth as an end in itself, we are also informed that God's blessings upon the faithful include material possessions.

Introduction

- Outline of “coming attractions:”
 - Why so much of the world’s wealth is in the hands of white Europeans
 - What wealth is (hint: it is not money)
 - Vocation and Investment
 - Three inescapable things you must consider
 - Debt and Insurance
 - Practical advice on wealth creation and preservation
 - Six “golden rules” for managing (husbanding) wealth that you can use regardless of your present income

Why Europe?

- Not just Europe, but northern Europe (and those countries that spring from Europe such as US, Canada, and Australia) owns most of the world's wealth. Why?
- The ***most important*** consideration is this: it is precisely in those parts of the world where freedom has been emphasized and to some degree achieved that we find the greatest concentrations of wealth.

Why Europe?

- Under colonial rule, many of the nations of Africa and Asia became net exporters of food.
- Yet in recent years famine has appeared in previously “fertile” areas.
- Before the arrival of the “white man” in this country, the “natives” were making a subsistence living at best and famine at worst.
- Yet America is today the richest country in the world.

Why Europe?

- The Bible-believing Christian understands that there is a personal God who controls everything and blesses those who follow his will.
 - It is not surprising for us to learn that economic advancement (***part of the blessings of Deut 28***) has come to those parts of the globe where Christian faith and character have been most prominent.

Why Europe?

- This idea of progress, essential to biblical Christianity, goes against much prevailing “Christian thinking” today:
 - First, many confine salvation to the narrow area of “personal assurance of heaven upon death.”
 - Second, many have adopted a false “eschatology” which colors their thinking about the present as well as the future. [eschatology is the theological study of “end times”]

The Failure of Ancient Rome

- By the time of Emperor Constantine, the end of ancient Rome was in sight (approx 300 AD).
- The Roman Empire placed its faith in the Roman state and its Caesars.
- This led to a range of economic restrictions upon the individual.
 - For example, it was necessary to receive permission from the state before one could buy or sell.
 - Also, the upper classes had a hostility to using their hands for either making money or serving others.

The Failure of Ancient Rome

- Ancient Rome was a slave society. Thus even though Roman engineers had developed the water mill capacity to about three HP during the first century BC, the Romans were reluctant to develop the technology because of the effect it would have had on employment.
- Rather than provide an environment where what we would call entrepreneurs could develop new business activities, the Roman world instead based its economy on slavery and serfdom.

The Failure of Ancient Rome

- Under Diocletian (the greatest persecutor of the Christian church among the emperors), state control of the means of production – what we today call *socialism* – was instituted.
- The government purchased control over economic activity and those who accepted the controls were guaranteed the security of a job.
- This led in turn to wage & price controls, increased tax burden, tax evasion, and finally torture to find the hidden wealth. Hidden wealth reduces productivity even further.

The Failure of Ancient Rome

- The concealment of wealth – what we today call *hoarding* – is a sign of people's basic lack of faith in the social conditions, and occurs whenever people are afraid of the future.
- This in turn created a “shortage of money” which led to a further inability to pay taxes and provided an environment in which the government freely debased the currency. This helps explain why Rome was so easily overrun by barbarians in subsequent centuries.

Reform In The West

- Even at its height the Roman empire did not achieve the advances that came about during the medieval period in western Europe.
 - For example, in Roman times the price of goods doubled for every 100 miles of transportation needed to get the goods to market. During the early medieval period 100 miles of transport only added 30% to the cost of goods.
 - The harnessing of water power in the medieval period allowed one person to grind what would have taken 40 people to grind without the machine. This development of machine power has been called “The First Industrial Revolution.”

Reform In The West

- Three-field rotation brought about a significant economic gain.
 - In the late 8th century, this replaced two-field rotation.
 - Under that system, a 600 acre manor would plant 300 acres and leave 300 acres fallow. The following year, the areas were reversed.
 - Under the three-field system, 400 acres were planted and 200 were left fallow. This invention is attributed to Charlemagne and basically provided an additional 100 acres per year (roughly 17% of all arable land) on which to grow food in a given year.
 - This also provided impetus to place more land in production since it would not have to lie fallow for as long.

Reform In The West

- By the end of the first millennium AD, forest land was being cleared, rivers and streams were diked, and arable land was being reclaimed from swamps and moors.
- Three field rotation also allowed for the planting of a second crop, thus increasing crop variety and decreasing the dependence of the economy on a single crop.
- **Important:** the inevitable result of increased agricultural activity was “global warming.” Thus there was actually an increase in average temperature for nearly 1000 years between 800 AD and the middle of the 17th century. This also gave rise to the ability to have a longer growing season and required that water resources be carefully guarded.

Reform In The West

- Such were just a few of the innovations during the middle ages. Such innovations could not occur under the Romans because of their attitude toward work.
- In the Roman world, work as a means of providing income, was frowned upon.
- The Christian monks and monasteries, on the other hand, insisted that work is worship. *Laborare est orare* was an identifying mark of a truly Christian monastery.
- The faith that replaced the Roman Empire was governed by a standard that made work something noble, worthwhile, and godly. Biblical Christianity positively encourages human endeavor.

The Rise of “Western Civilization”

- Once the human spirit was released from pagan Rome, it was enabled to **spread its wings and soar**.
 - The development of the **horse collar** and the **horse shoe** provided an increase in the *amount of available energy* in society, meaning a potential *increase in productive capacity* for the medieval farmer that was unheard of in earlier days.

The Rise of “Western Civilization”

- The horse replaced the ox in Europe as the preferred work animal:
 - In Pagan times, the horse could only pull about 500 Kg. (approx. 1100 lbs.), but with the advent of the horse collar which placed the weight upon the horses withers, his pulling capacity was increased by five-fold or more.
 - The horse could work faster than an ox, and this increase in energy meant the farmers in medieval Europe immediately increased the energy available to grow and harvest their crops by seven to eight times by turning from oxen (who ate more) to horses (who ate less).

The Rise of “Western Civilization”

- In other words, European Christians – in a single generation – increased the amount of energy produced and expended by seven to eight times.
- The increase in the amount of energy produced and expended coincided with an increase in population, economic activity, and global warming.

The Rise of “Western Civilization”

- By the fourteenth century (1300s) western Europe had overtaken China as the more technologically advanced civilization.
- The greatest advancement in medieval technology may have been the crank (modern technology is characterized by rotary motion and reciprocal motion being interchangeable). The crank led to modern capitalism, industrialism, and urbanization.

The Rise of “Western Civilization”

■ Jean Gimpel, *The Medieval Machine*:

- *“Conditions favored free enterprise, and this led to the rise of the self made man.... Energy consumption increased considerably [which] led to a successful search for new sources of energy. Many of the tasks formerly done by hand were now done by machine. This led to extensive industrial pollution of waterways...with grave long term consequences.... The entrepreneurs, landowners, and financiers were able to extract large profits from this industrial expansion...[which] brought about modern methods of accountancy and banking.... The period was characterized by a sense of optimism, a rationalist attitude, and a firm belief in progress.”*

The Rise of “Western Civilization”

- We should refuse to refer to that time as “the dark ages.” It was a very enlightened age with a great energy that led, eventually, to a “second industrial revolution.”
- **The point:** Western civilization is built upon centuries of innovation and technical development, and it was the Christian religion that provided the environment necessary for the improvements in social conditions.

The Rise of “Western Civilization”

- “Christianity brought to the pagan world a new sense of sanctity of all human life, the spiritual value of the family, the spiritual superiority of self-denial over egoistic fulfillment, of unworldly holiness over worldly ambition, of gentleness and forgiveness over violence and retribution; a condemnation of murder, suicide, infanticide, the massacre of prisoners, the degradation of slaves, sexual licentiousness and prostitution, bloody circus spectacles....” Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our Worldview*, p. 117.

The Rise of “Western Civilization”

- Much more could be said about the invention of the stirrup and the saddle horn, but time does not allow.
- The point is that a Christian society and worldview not only produces wealth, but leads to a moral use of that wealth to increase the kingdom of God on earth. This is the legacy of medieval Christianity.

The Rise of “Western Civilization”

- “...the high conception that has been formed of the sanctity of human life, the protection of infants, the elevation and final emancipation of the slave classes, the suppression of the barbaric games, the creation of a vast and multifarious organization of charity, and education of the imagination by the Christian type, constitute together a movement of philanthropy which has never been paralleled or even approached in the Pagan world.” W.E.H. Lecky, *History of European Morals*, vol. 2, p. 85.

The Freedom To Invest

- So what? What does all this history have to do with your wealth? Everything!
- It is easy to confuse means and ends. The pursuit of wealth should be seen in the context of seeking the kingdom of God. Wealth is intended by God as means for us to bring glory to Him by the increase of His Son's kingdom.

The Freedom To Invest

- Wealth consists of all the material and spiritual blessing that God has bestowed upon us. We must beware limiting our view of wealth to money alone. Money is a means of exchange whereby we can get better tools, a better education, repaint or repair the car, get food for our families, etc. But money only serves its true purpose when it is exchanged for something else.

The Freedom To Invest

- Wealth is therefore not just our money, but the whole range of economic goods and services available at our disposal: the myriad of things for which money can be exchanged.
- Our concept of what society is or should be in terms of God's word should be the key element in our gaining and using material wealth.

Inferences

- If liberty and freedom are necessary conditions in order to fulfill our callings under God, then our wealth strategy (of gaining, using, and investing wealth) must first of all be designed to establish and further such conditions.
- The direction that many of our so-called Christian countries are headed is that of less liberty, and this direction is being financed by the improper use of wealth. It is a sad commentary that so many Christians are inadvertently involved in financing the devil's work.

Inferences

- Our wealth strategy, therefore, must aim at achieving liberty and freedom for both ourselves and our neighbors.
- A free society is not (and cannot be) produced by communism, socialism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Buddhism, humanism, or Islam; it is Christianity alone that produced the relatively free society of the Western world.

Inferences

- Scripture teaches that we must consider the circumstances of our neighbor and do all that we can to help him. **This motive is the necessary ingredient to lubricate the wheels of commerce.** Material advancement is not possible unless those at the cutting edge of technology produce the goods and services that will help their fellow men work out their own callings under God.
- In other words, the main aim of business is to provide goods and services for other people.

Inferences

- Failure to understand the forces that work against the Christian establishing godly behavior can lead to financial shipwreck. So next time we shall look at two more influences that should occupy our attention in order to understand wealth management.