

ECONOMIC GROWTH

THE KINGDOM ECONOMY 10



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The Fellowship of Ailbe

A REVISION STUDY

Economic Growth
The Kingdom Economy Part 10
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The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Welcome to *Economic Growth*

A healthy economy is a growing economy. Any economy that cannot produce sustained growth over time will be tweaked, changed, or replaced. If an economy cannot produce growth, there is every reason to believe it is not a viable model.

The same is true for the Kingdom economy of God. God intends His *administration* to grow and bear much fruit, precisely according to His *plan*. This is just what we would expect in an economy underwritten by the Word of God and powered by His Spirit.

But we need to understand the *forms* such growth should take, and to embrace our role in pursuing growth in the Kingdom economy. In this final part of our series on *The Kingdom Economy*, we will consider the key components necessary for that economy to increase and advance on earth, as it is in heaven.

These studies are designed for individual or group use. While you may derive much benefit from studying on your own, that benefit can be greatly enhanced by joining with a friend or a group to read, discuss, share, challenge, and pray for one another.

If you're in a group, make sure you prepare for each study by reading through the lesson in advance and answering the questions in writing. Take turns leading your group. Let every member share in the privilege and responsibility of facilitating discussions. Group leaders should not feel like they have to "have all the answers." Their task is simply to lead the group through the readings and questions, and to help everyone participate.

Visit our website, www.ailbe.org, to subscribe to our free instructional newsletters, including *ReVision*, *Scriptorium*, *The Week*, and *Crosfigell*, featuring insights from Scripture and our Celtic Christian forebears.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Wanted: Devoted Learners

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. Hebrews 2.1

A divine order

Throughout this series, we have examined what the Apostle Paul describes in Ephesians 3.9 as a divine plan, administration, or economy which has begun to unfold on earth since the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. God, Paul insists, has a plan, which He is administering, and which affects everything that takes place in time. The word in the Greek is *oikonomia* – economy. It means an order, an administration, a way of “keeping house” that flows from a set of priorities through a bank of resources into a new order on earth, one that refracts the things of heaven.

These last days are the days of the Kingdom economy. All who have been called to the Kingdom and glory of God through our Lord Jesus Christ must devote their time and all their labors, as agents of grace and justice, to the work of seeking and advancing the rule of King Jesus.

There is a Kingdom economy, and God is setting it up in our midst, right now, today, and every day of our lives. We are part of that great plan, and thus it behooves us to understand as much as we can about it, so that we can make our way in the divine economy according to God’s purposes and designs.

Listen up!

This is the thrust of the words of our text. The writer of Hebrews understood that, with the beginning of the divine economy, there is much for us to do, and much for us to learn. The divine plan comes to expression in the form of a Kingdom, ruled by Jesus Christ, administered by His Spirit, and put in place by His Church, the members of His Body. As individual believers, following the guidance of God’s Word, draw on the power of the Holy Spirit to shape and lead them, they advance the divine economy, bringing blessing and truth to everything and everyone.

So if we want to participate in this great work of God, we’d better learn to listen up.

The writer of Hebrews refers to this divine economy as “so great a salvation” (v. 3). Indeed, the salvation God has been pleased to grant us in Jesus Christ is not merely soothing and renewing for our souls. Rather, God intends His salvation to bring redemption, reconciliation, and restoration to the entire world, the whole vast cosmos (Jn. 3.16; 2 Cor. 5.19).

And, while we will not see that complete renewing of all things until Jesus returns, ushering in the new heavens and new earth, even now, in our everyday lives and circumstances, believers are called to *advance that Kingdom economy* as their highest priority in every area of their lives (Matt. 6.33). If we are faithful and diligent in this mandate, we may expect to see genuine and abiding economic growth – growth in grace and justice – according to the plan and purposes of God.

Learning and re-learning

Because our salvation is so very great – encompassing every aspect of life and all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities – we have a good deal of “re-learning” to do concerning how the Kingdom economy should come to expression through us.

This is why all who follow King Jesus as He advances the divine economy are called *disciples*, or *learners*. In order to be of maximum service in advancing the divine economy, we must become devoted learners, men

and women eager to learn from Jesus Christ how His Word informs, shapes, and transforms every facet of our experience in the world. The writer of Hebrews warns that if we fail to “give the more earnest heed” to this great salvation, we will simply drift away from it, from the fullness of life and purpose and joy that Christ intends us to know. We will abandon our unique Kingdom-and-glory calling and assimilate more and more the ways of our materialistic and secular age.

So what is your program of learning, so that you can live as a good steward in the King economy?

Do you spend enough time in God’s Word, searching the Scriptures day by day in order to discover the mind of Christ for every aspect of your life? Do you read great Christian writers of the past and present? Seek out current Christian thinking on contemporary issues and concerns? Study with other believers in order better to equip yourself for advancing the divine economy? Does your prayer life reflect an insatiable hunger for the Lord, and for the knowledge of His will?

Would you say that you are a consistent, diligent, eager student of our great salvation, and that this is evident in how the Kingdom economy is coming to expression in your life?

We are called to be good stewards of the salvation God has entrusted to us, that we might be agents through whom the blessings and glory of God become known on earth. There’s a lot to learn here, so let us dedicate ourselves afresh each day to being the best learners – the best *disciples* – we can possibly be.

For reflection or discussion

1. How would you explain to an unbelieving friend what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?
2. What does Paul mean by a *divine economy*? How does such an economy differ from, let’s say, a free-market economy?
3. How *great* is our salvation? How much does it affect? Or should it affect? What is it like to grow in this salvation?

Next steps – Transformation: How would you describe your present approach to learning the ways of the Kingdom economy? What are you doing? How might you improve your efforts in this matter? Talk with a Christian friend about these questions, then agree to read and discuss the remaining installments in this series.

2 Growing in Christ

...but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 3.18

Pressing on day by day

The writer of the book of Hebrews warned his readers not to neglect the great salvation – the Kingdom economy – that had been entrusted to them. They must be careful, he explained, lest, failing to pay more earnest heed to our great salvation, they begin to drift away from it.

In Hebrews 2.5-8 the writer appeals to Psalm 8 to insist that God intends redeemed human beings to work to establish His divine order of blessing and goodness over all the creation. Here we can see that the original dominion mandate, first stated in Genesis 1, then restated in Psalm 8, continues in effect in our day, in which God’s great salvation, His Kingdom economy, is advancing on earth as it is in heaven.

The writer of Hebrews is emphatic in saying that God has “left nothing” outside the control of those who know Him. We who exist under the Lord are called to put all things under our feet, under Him. The disciples of Jesus Christ must press on, day by day, each in his or her own sphere of influence, to bring the unseen Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit to visible reality in all the relationships, roles, and responsibilities of our lives.

Begin here

Then our writer adds, “But now we do not yet see all things put under him.” Of course not. Our writer was in the first generation of the followers of Christ, and they’d hardly had time to do much more than establish a beachhead of Kingdom penetration into the Roman world. There was still a lot of hard work to be done in leading others to know Christ and helping them to become the kind of disciples who are determined to advance the divine economy into every nook and cranny of life.

We’re in something of the same situation today. Much remains to be done in bring the “all things” of our lives and world under the feet of King Jesus. Each of us needs to exercise stewardship over this high and holy calling within our own spheres of existence, in all the time of our lives and by all the work we’ve been given to do.

How do we do that?

We must begin with ourselves. We must be diligent in the matter of growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and King, Jesus Christ. We will not have the vision, motivation, or strength to work out our salvation into every area of life if we do not sustain a vital and vibrant, daily and intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eternal life consists precisely in this – knowing God and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent (Jn. 17.3). The “knowledge” of which Jesus spoke, and which Peter commands us to pursue, is both intellectual and experiential. It re-orientes our minds and retools and transforms our lives.

Growing two ways

We are attending to this aspect of our great salvation when in two ways we engage the presence and learn to rely on the provision of our Lord Jesus Christ.

First, we need to establish and jealously guard *regular time with Jesus*, in His Word and prayer, every day of our

lives.

It's good to start the day with the Lord, and to end it in prayerful reflection as well.

But because He is our hope, our all in all, our greatest joy and pleasure, we would do well, in the second place, to *meet with Him periodically throughout the day*. Setting aside a few minutes, several times a day, to reflect on our morning reading or the events of the day thus far, to give thanks and praise for the Lord's goodness and provision, and to seek His help for what remains ahead in the day – such times of brief retiring into the Lord can help to focus our vision of Him, cultivate our love for Him, and strengthen our ability to know His presence with us through all the moments and activities of our lives.

A privilege and a challenge

Knowing Jesus Christ is an ongoing privilege and challenge. The *privilege* is that we are able to think His thoughts after Him, know His power at work within us, and further His grace and truth purposes in everything we do.

The *challenge* is to make sure, every day, that we are consciously and faithfully seeking to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Only as Jesus is formed more completely in us will we be able to fulfill our stewardship in advancing the Kingdom economy of God.

For reflection or discussion

1. Why do we say that knowing Christ is a great privilege and challenge?
2. How would you describe your approach to growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord at this time? What evidence have you seen that this is the best approach for you?
3. In what sense is “knowing God and Jesus Christ” the sum and substance of eternal life?

Next steps – Transformation: Meditate on 2 Corinthians 3:12-18. In what specific ways can you say that you are presently being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ? Talk with a Christian friend about this question.

3 The Vision of Christ

But now we do not yet see all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. Hebrews 2.8, 9

Never out of sight

In the halcyon days of Marxism-Leninism, you could easily tell whether the nation you might be visiting was committed to the communist cause.

In just about every public place, some picture, statue, or caricature of the “Great Leader” would confront your wondering eyes. Whether it was of Lenin, Stalin, Castro, Mao, Che, or any of the other pantheon of now-discredited demigods, the larger-than-life representations of their images were always a prominent feature of communist public life.

These images of the great thinkers and dictators of Marxist-Leninist thought were meant to accomplish two purposes, one inspiring and one intimidating. By placing these icons in various public places, communist leaders hoped to inspire their people with the memory and example of their Great Leader – his vaunted courage, vision, and determination above all. Thus they would learn to be content with their lot and take up their role in the communist economy as dutiful workers.

If the people were not *inspired* by these icons, they would at least have been *intimidated*, for the many depictions of communist leaders in public places served to remind the people that, in a very real sense, they were never out of sight of the Great Leader – or, at least, of his informants.

Our Great Leader

The writer of the book of Hebrews understood the psychology of this. But his observation that we see Jesus Christ, exalted at the right hand of God, is much more powerful and, if we will engage it, more effective in helping the followers of Christ to advance the Kingdom economy.

Jesus Christ is exalted at the right hand of God. He has overcome death and the grave, so we no longer fear these constant threats (Heb. 2.15). He is clothed in splendor and glory and strength and light, and God the Father is putting all His enemies under His feet, increasingly, with each passing day. At the Father’s right hand Jesus intercedes for us, seeking the strength and provision of His Father and ours to meet our every need through His own riches in glory.

From His position of power, the Lord Jesus gives us His Spirit without measure and sends His angels to watch over us all day long. Further, He is putting all His enemies under His feet and, thus, clearing the way for us to advance the divine economy with maximum efficiency and effects.

The eye of the heart

But in what sense do we actually “see” Jesus like this?

Only with the eye of the heart (as the Greek puts it), as Paul explains in Ephesians 1.18. Jesus is truly seated at the Father’s right hand, radiant in beauty, matchless in power, and doing all these wonderful and glorious things on our behalf. We cannot see Him with the eye of flesh. But we can see Him with the eye of the heart, the eye of faith, the eye of understanding, which gathers all the many snapshots and reports of Christ exalted, scattered throughout the Word of God, and pieces them together into a living portrait of glory, power, and rule to guide our thinking and action day by day.

Paul commands us to “seek those things which are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God,” and to “Set your minds on things above” (Col. 3.1, 2). This is no idle exhortation, but an invitation to see, like the prophet Elisha (2 Kgs. 6.16, 17), beyond the veil that separates time from eternity, the material from the spiritual world, into the very throne room of Christ, where, astonishingly, we discover ourselves to be seated with Him in glory (Eph. 2.6).

With our outlook on life informed by the vision of Christ exalted, and all our daily endeavors lit by His Word and empowered by His Spirit, we can expect that, increasingly, the reality of His rule and the progress of His economy, will be evident in all our words and deeds, in every area of our lives.

No, the followers of Christ have not, as of this moment, managed to order all of life and creation according to the good and upright plan of God.

But we know Jesus, and we are daily working to grow in our relationship with Him. And if, knowing Him, we can learn to *see* Him, to *set our minds* on the vision of Christ exalted, that prospect, that vantage point will increasingly affect the way we live, even in the most mundane, everyday activities of our lives.

For reflection or discussion

1. What are some ways the Scriptures present Jesus for us to “see”?
2. What is the “eye of the heart” or the “eye of understanding”? How does it work? How well does it work in you?
3. What does it mean to “set your mind” on the things of Christ? How can believers help one another in doing this?

Next steps – Preparation: How clear and compelling is your vision of Christ exalted in glory? How often do you set your mind on this glorious vision? Ask a pastor or church leader to help you improve your vision of Christ in glory.

Prayer:

4 Pushing the Limits

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us... Ephesians 3.20

Power at work within

Given the straightforward, unadorned way in which Paul makes this declaration, it's surprising that so few of the followers of Jesus Christ seem to take it to heart.

The power that flows from the eternal throne of our risen Lord is the power which is at work within us – the power of God's indwelling Spirit. He makes us willing and able to do what comports with the pleasure of God (Phi. 2.13). He is able to do in and through us exceedingly abundantly above all we could ever ask or think.

This being so, why are so many of us “underachievers” for the Lord? Why are so many Christians failing to thrive? Content to remain babes in Christ? Unwilling to take up the hard work of learning and growing toward maturity?

In any church it's always a handful of people who make everything happen. Twenty per cent of the people do all the work while eighty per cent simply wait to be served by whatever the leaders choose to do next. Most believers are not growing very much in the Lord, and certainly the level of their service for Christ, or even what they endeavor in His Name, remains pretty much the same, year-in and year-out.

Stuck in our limitations

The problem is, I think, that as human beings, we know our limitations.

And we are trapped there, ensnared in our small vision, limited experience, and doubting minds.

There are certain things we've never done before, and so we assume that such things, whatever they may be, are not part of what God expects for us. We might assume that these are not things we should endeavor. Someone else, better prepared and with more experience, will have to take up these callings.

But if the Spirit of God lives in us, and if He is, indeed, able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think, should we not expect *more* of ourselves than merely what we've ever known or endeavored in the past? Shall we be limited by our experience when an exceeding abundant power is at work within us? Shall how *we* see ourselves be the defining terms of our existence, rather than how *Christ* sees us?

Or shall we push out to the *exceedingly abundantly above* limits and experience of God's Spirit?

Stretching out in the Spirit

If you're beginning to feel stretched to the limits of what you might be able to learn or do in advancing the Kingdom economy, then there's a simple solution: Stop relying only on your experience and present abilities, and begin stretching out into the vast resources of the Spirit of God!

What does that entail?

First, you have to get to *know the Spirit* and to discover what He intends to do in and through you. The Spirit is able to bring forth in you virtues and characteristics that are more like Jesus Christ than anything you've

ever demonstrated (Gal. 5.22, 23).

He can fill you with power to bear bold and consistent witness for Christ with your neighbors (Acts 1.8).

The Spirit can teach you the Law of God and enable you to walk, like Jesus did, within the path of righteousness the Law marks out (Ezek. 36.26, 27; 1 Jn. 2.1-6).

The Spirit is ready to deploy a wide range of gifts and abilities within you, to enable you to serve others in ways you've never done before (1 Cor. 12.7-11).

The Spirit can enlighten and empower you to bring the glory of God to light in all your work, all your time, every relationship, role, and responsibility of your life, so that the hope of glory in which you live will become the hope of glory others seem more consistently in every area of your life (1 Pet. 3.15).

In fact, the more you learn about the Holy Spirit, and the more you realize that this powerful Spirit is at work within you, to make you willing and able to do God's pleasure (Phil. 2.12, 13), the more you will begin to venture beyond yourself, beyond your past experience, into new areas of trusting the Lord and relying on His Spirit to do what *He* is eager and able to do, and not just what *you* might be willing to endeavor.

We can't out-think or out-ask the Holy Spirit with respect to how He might use us in advancing the Kingdom economy. The problem with most of us, I suspect, is that we don't dare to *think* much beyond what we're familiar or comfortable with already, and we seldom *ask* the Spirit to take us further and deeper into new areas of life or ministry.

God is able to do in and through you more than you're willing to think or ask. When you line up your thoughts and desires with God's plan for you, you'll begin to see the Kingdom economy advancing in leaps and strides through your life.

For reflection or discussion

1. Do you agree that many believers are "underachievers" in their discipleship? Why or why not?
2. When it comes to following Jesus, how might we be able to tell when we were allowing ourselves to be hindered by our experience?
3. What might be some ways the Spirit of God could work "exceedingly abundantly above" in your life?

Next steps – Transformation: In what areas of your life would you like to see the Spirit of God stretching out a bit more? Talk with a Christian friend about this question.

5 Glory in the Everyday

Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10.31

Compartmental lives

Many Christians live a compartmentalized experience of following Jesus.

That is, they have reserved room in their lives and schedules where things like discipleship and seeking the Kingdom are appropriate, and then there are rooms in their lives and schedules where such matters don't seem to be particularly relevant.

Thus, we think about our faith and the Lord and what it means to follow Him when we're at church, or with our Bible study group or in some other church activity, or while we're reading Scripture and praying. But when we head out into the everyday, workaday world of people and culture and things to do, somehow our Christian faith doesn't seem to apply. For most of us, God and His will have a *place* in those compartments, but not *primacy* of place, not a *defining* or *transforming* place. As long as we live compartmentalized lives, we will not experience the presence, promise, or power of the Kingdom in the ways God intends.

But the Kingdom economy of our Lord knows no compartments, save that of the glory of God.

Some questions

In your own experience, for example, how often during the day do you find yourself contemplating the glory of God in the midst of some everyday situation, or while pondering some ordinary thing? Do you frequently sense the presence of the Lord while you're at work, or as you're taking care of your lawn, shopping for groceries, or preparing the evening meal? Are you continually aware that all your conversations, no matter how trivial, are fraught with opportunities to show Jesus to others? And that He is present in them all, attending to every word, and eager to fill your words with Himself?

Probably most of us would answer these questions in the negative, or with a tentative "Sometimes." Sadly, the world is the world and our faith is our faith, and never the twain shall meet.

But in these last days, as God is unfolding the Kingdom of His dear Son in, through, and around us, everything matters, and everything that comes into our hands or purview is an opportunity for advancing the Kingdom economy of God.

Paul wrote that even such everyday activities as eating and drinking can, and should, be done with a view to glorifying God, showing Him to others in every aspect of our demeanor. In the Kingdom economy, as we pursue our Kingdom-and-glory calling from the Lord, we must remember that God has subjected everything to His redeemed people, and He calls us to receive everything as a gift and to use it for His honor and glory (Heb. 2.5-8).

Stewards of everything

We are stewards of everything God puts into our hands – all our time, possessions, relationships, work, resources, and opportunities. We are called to spend and invest the grace of God, according to His Word, in every one of these areas and activities.

God calls us to make the best use of our time, and all the work we do *in* our time, as agents of grace, truth, and justice, so that the purposes of His Kingdom go forward and the light of Christ advances against the

darkness of the sinful world (Eph. 5.15-17; 1 Jn. 2.8).

We will find that, the more we strive to grow in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to know His presence with us throughout the day; and the more we learn to stretch out beyond the limits of our experience into the richer, fuller life of God's Spirit, this calling to do everything to the glory of God will not be as difficult or daunting as it might seem.

In 1 Corinthians 10.31-11.1, Paul gives us some practical guidance on how we can make sure that everything in our lives matters for advancing the divine economy on earth as it is in heaven.

First, he says, work hard *not to offend others* by your demeanor or conversation (v. 32). If we can learn to speak winsomely and in an edifying manner, and to overcome offensive habits or ways, others will begin to see us in a different light, and will enjoy our presence more.

Second, Paul writes, *work hard to please others* – not, of course in a way that compromises your most basic convictions, but so that you try to meet their needs and serve them as Jesus would (v. 33). Don't always be thinking about yourself, in other words; look to the interests of others before your own.

Third, watch for open doors to *talk about the Lord* (v. 33). Evangelism is a process, not an event. You don't have to share the whole Gospel at every opportunity; instead, work to get a start on or participate in conversations that you can continue and expand on subsequent occasions.

Finally, try to *live like the apostles did* (11.1) – humbly, as good stewards, eager to grow in the Lord and His holiness, looking to serve others by every possible means, committed to being witnesses for Christ in every aspect of your life.

Our lives and everything in them will begin to matter more for the divine economy if we can learn to follow Paul's counsel in exercising the dominion of Christ over everything in our lives, for the glory of God and the progress of His Kingdom.

For reflection or discussion

1. What do we mean by saying that many Christians live “compartmentalized” lives? How does this happen?
2. Why does everything matter in the divine economy? Can you give some examples?
3. “We are stewards of everything God puts into our hands – all our time, possessions, relationships, work, resources, and opportunities.” What does it mean to glorify God in such matters?

Next steps – Transformation: What's one thing you could begin to do that would enable you to make better use of the time God gives you for advancing His economy in your life? Talk with a Christian friend about this question.

6 Overcoming Evil

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Romans 12:21

Not a cakewalk

Advancing the Kingdom economy is not exactly a cakewalk. It's hard work – like running a marathon, going to war against spiritual adversaries, cultivating a field, or embarking on a long and arduous journey. We may expect to encounter many obstacles and challenges along the way as we seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Indeed, some of these will arise from within our own souls, as the law of sin continues to exert its nefarious powers upon our hearts, minds, and consciences. Other challenges will come from well-meaning believers, who'll think you're getting just a little too serious about this discipleship thing. Still others will come from those who oppose the Gospel, as well as from the pervasive presence of sin throughout the various institutions of our culture and society.

Jesus warned us that in this world we would have trouble (cf. Jn. 16:33). Paul said all who desire to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will know trouble and persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). As surely as we have received the gift of saving faith, so we can expect to know the gift of suffering (Phil. 1:29).

So there will be no lack of evil to confront us along the path as we labor to advance the Kingdom economy in ourselves and our world.

We must neither run from these challenges nor give in to them. Instead, advancing the Kingdom economy requires that we face evil head-on, and determine to overcome it by good works of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17-19).

Levels of opposition

We can expect to engage this part of Kingdom-seeking at various levels, beginning in our own souls.

Here is a call to become more astute at recognizing and resisting temptation, and rejoicing in the face of trials and difficulties. We will *fall through* temptation into sin if we don't have in place strategies for resisting the devil and staying the course with righteousness. But we can *grow through* temptation and trial if we seek the Lord, rejoice in Him, rest in His Word, and draw on the indwelling power of His Spirit to stay focused on Jesus and walking in His path.

We can also expect to confront evil in others.

Here we have a duty to try to help our brothers and sisters in the Lord to break free from the grip of sin and press on in righteousness. Christian love requires that we confront wayward brethren in love, like Paul did Peter in Antioch (cf. Gal. 2:11-14). If we turn our back on sin in the lives of our fellow disciples, we actually do harm to the cause of Kingdom growth. But if, through gracious confrontation, we are able to pull a brother back from dalliance in sin, then we shall have helped him overcome evil and be better equipped to serve the Lord more effectively.

Then there will be plenty of evil around us in the culture and society of our day.

We must be prepared both to speak a prophetic word against the practice of wickedness, and to show the way

to righteousness, justice, and conduct that pleases the Lord in every area of life. So we must become students of good works, and of how the good works for which we have been redeemed (Eph. 2.10) should come to expression in every area of life. And we must encourage our fellow believers, in every area of life, to pursue those good works which glorify God in all their ways (Heb. 10.24).

Overcome evil with good

Paul instructs us to overcome the evil of our lives and times with specific good works, those which accord with the Law of God, the example of Jesus, and the teaching of the Apostles.

Jesus promised that we would shine like a city on a hill if we live out our good works for all to see, and Paul insisted that we should make our good works conspicuous as part of our calling to follow Jesus (Matt. 5.13-16; 1 Tim. 5.25).

As disciples of Jesus and stewards of His Kingdom economy, believers must be diligent in the practice of every good work. We must become, as Paul put it, “devoted” to good works (Titus 3.8, 14). This, he explained, is the way to be fruitful and to meet the urgent needs of our day.

And in order to do this, we’ll need to be ready, every day, to battle with evil.

For reflection or discussion

1. Give some examples of why living for Christ in the divine economy is “not a cakewalk.”
2. What’s the difference between *falling* through temptation and *growing* to it? What’s the key to getting it right when temptation arises (cf. 1 Cor. 10.13)?
3. Suggest some positive ways Christians can help one another to face up to sin in their lives and get busy working to overcome it.

Next steps – Preparation: Where do you typically encounter obstacles or opposition to the progress of the divine economy? How do you deal with this? How can believers help one another in this matter? Talk about these questions with a believing friend.

7 Stay the Course

...whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end... For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end... Hebrews 3.6, 14

A life-long commitment

Whatever else we have been called to do in life, advancing the Kingdom economy must be the larger framework and the overarching paradigm that guides our efforts. If we are not seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, beginning in our souls and working out into every area of our lives, then we are disobeying the most fundamental commandment of our Lord, and we cannot expect to know His blessings.

As followers of Jesus Christ we have been translated into a new Kingdom, where a new agenda and new power await us, to help us fulfill our callings of subduing and reconciling all things back to God.

The Kingdom of God is advancing all around us, and each of us, as followers of Jesus, has a unique and important contribution to make toward realizing and reifying that great salvation which has been granted to us. This calling to seek the Kingdom and advance the divine economy is a lifelong commitment; we must never draw back, never relax our progress, and never allow anything to get in the way of knowing, living, and proclaiming that great salvation which we have in Jesus Christ.

Ours to prove

The writer of Hebrews is emphatic on this matter. A true Christian, he writes, will stay the course for the whole course of his life. We are true Christians *if* we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. We are true Christians “if indeed we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.” And then, in chapter 4, “Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it... Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience” (vv. 1, 11).

So if God has called you to His Kingdom and glory (1 Thess. 2.12), and if you have truly tasted of the divine economy and its many and abundant promises, get ready to stay in the fight for the long haul.

But what is involved in holding fast our confidence and our boasting? And what does it mean to “hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end”?

This clearly relates to our hope in the Gospel, the profession of faith in Christ that we make before others, and the lifestyle we pursue as citizens of the Kingdom of God. Consider the various images of the Christian life presented in Hebrews and elsewhere: Following Jesus is like running a marathon race; it’s a boxing match and warfare; it’s like a farmer working his fields and a soldier going into battle.

Is that your experience of discipleship? Or does that sound like more than you’re willing to endure? And are you prepared to keep this up for the rest of your life? Because if the writer of Hebrews is correct, we must prove – *prove*, I say, not earn – our salvation every day, in every way, at all times, in all our work, with all grace and obedience, for the rest of our lives.

The real proof of salvation

Anyone can taste of the salvation of Christ and even convince himself he’s really saved. But that’s no proof at all, as the writer of Hebrews makes clear in chapter 6. The real proof of salvation is a life of work and love, demonstrated in ministry to others, clinging to the hope of glory and laboring in faith and patience day by day

for the progress of the Kingdom (Heb. 6.9-12).

This may sound like the writer is commending a view of salvation by works. He is not. He is commending a view of salvation *issuing* in works, works which flow as naturally and persistently from a redeemed heart as rivers of living water well up and overflow from the divine fountain of love (Jn. 7.37-39).

If we know the Lord, the writer of Hebrews insists – echoing all the other apostles – we will press on and strive for the progress of the divine economy, in all the ways we’ve been describing, for all the days of our lives. We will focus our vision on Christ, learn as much as we can about the Kingdom economy He is advancing, devote ourselves entirely to Him each day, set goals, make plans, walk in His Spirit according to His Word, and work while it is still day to bring the Light of Jesus into all the dark places of the world where the Lord sends us.

We need one another in this struggle, to help, instruct, guide, direct, and encourage, as well as to warn, admonish, correct, rebuke, and restore. The love of Jesus can renew us day by day, as we fix our minds on the Author and Perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12.1, 2), and then we can help one another in this great and glorious struggle to advance the divine economy, day by day, to the praise of the glory of God’s grace.

For reflection or discussion

1. What do we mean by saying that the salvation of the Lord is “ours to prove”?
2. Why is it so hard for many believers to “hold fast” their confidence and their confession? How can believers help one another in this important matter?
3. Is it possible for someone to *think* he is saved, but not actually *be* saved? Explain:

Next steps: In what ways has this series helped you to think about your faith in a new light? Talk with a pastor or church leader to help you move forward more effectively in the divine economy.

Prayer:

For reflection or discussion

1. What would you regard as some indicators that the Kingdom of God was making progress in you, in your soul and life?
2. What is involved in putting everything in your life under the feet of Jesus? How would you evaluate your vision of Christ exalted at this time?
3. How can we know when we are quenching the Spirit? How can believers help one another to press on in seeking Kingdom progress in every area of life?
4. What are some ways you might expect the Kingdom economy to make progress in your church? Your community? Our world in these last days?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you planning to implement that lesson in your walk with and work for the Lord?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.