

THE DIVINE ECONOMY

THE LAW OF GOD AND PUBLIC POLICY: PART 5



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A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

The Divine Economy
The Law of God and Public Policy: Part 5
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Welcome to *The Divine Economy*

It might surprise some of us to learn that we who believe in Jesus operate in two economies at once.

Of course, we participate in the materialist economy of free markets, getting and spending, investments, business, a floating currency, and all the rest. But this system of getting along together neither defines nor constrains us.

For we are citizens of the Kingdom of God and we live in a divine economy, an economy of grace and truth, which gives guidance and direction to everything else we do.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Toward a New Economics

“You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD your God is giving you.” Deuteronomy 16.19, 20

The goal of economic life

The business of life in our modern/postmodern world has become the business of economics. Government, education, work, relationships, personal decision-making—all are guided, above all else, by considerations of economic wellbeing: How can I maximize my personal prosperity?

Money, wealth, and the conveniences these afford have become the bottom line for all of life.

Consequently, public policymaking is also driven—and justified—by appeal to economics, and that very broadly defined. If, for example, it is in the interest of the economy to “stimulate” this or that sector—such as the “green revolution”—policies will be drafted and adopted to do so, whether in the form of subsidies, tax breaks, or other means. At the individual level, policies are established to ensure that individual citizens have the right to maximize their personal wellbeing. Which makes government happy since it has perfected so many different ways of skimming the wealth of its citizens to pursue its agendas and pad its pockets.

So whether the need is educational opportunity, supplemental income or other kinds of support, or even the “freedom” to abort an unwanted child, public policies are created to further the private economic interests of as many people as possible.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* “economics” is “The science relating to the production and distribution of material wealth.” “Material wealth” is the driving force of the American economy, and tends, therefore, to be the driving force for most other aspects of life as well, including how we define matters such as justice and the good society.

But there are dangers here. Material wealth can be an uncertain foundation from which to pursue, and an unstable pillar on which to build, one’s personal happiness. Even more, the quest for material wealth can divide societies, corrupt politics, justify all manner of questionable enterprises, and distract people from more important considerations related to human flourishing.

Which is why the Law of God does not embrace wealth as the goal or meaning of life.

A different kind of economy

The Law of God establishes a different standard and objective for the economics of a nation. The Law of God introduces a “divine economy” which holds more promise for human flourishing than the mere pursuit of material wealth. The Law of God is not opposed to wealth; it only insists that wealth, whatever the level any individual may enjoy, must be used in a manner consistent with the tenets of love for God and neighbor.

The word, “economics,” derives from a Greek term which means, simply, “the management of a household.” Questions of economics, therefore, are directed at discovering the best ways of helping people live together in society—in a good society—in love for God and one another. The pursuit of material wealth, while it has become the default mindset of the American economy, is by no means the only possible standard and objective a society might embrace. Nor has it proven to be a reliable framework for transactions promoting the practice of neighbor love.

The Law of God commands that the affairs of a people should be governed by what is good in the eyes of

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God—not by the accumulation of wealth, but by the practice of justice. As we have seen, justice describes a condition among people in community which reflects the character of God and is defined by neighbor love at the human level. The Law of God sets forth a program for pursuing an economics of justice, rather than an economics of material wealth.

We scarcely know how to begin thinking in such terms.

The Lord Jesus Christ came, as part of His program of redemption, to enable people to realize the economics of justice set forth in the Law of God: “Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles... He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait for His law” (Is. 42.1, 4). In the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus announced that He had come to bring to the world the “acceptable year of the LORD” (Lk. 4.17-21), a code word indicating the arrival of the Kingdom of righteousness (justice), peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. He explained that greatness in His Kingdom—in the Kingdom of righteousness and justice—is grounded in knowing, doing, and teaching the Law of God (Matt. 5.17-19). Indeed, Jesus insisted, it is not possible to practice justice and the love which undergirds it apart from the Law and all the Word of the Lord (Matt. 22.34-40).

The social order God intends for the world is based on love, not wealth. It strives to increase love, not a portfolio. And it pursues justice and righteousness as the proper state of a good society.

An economic mission

The Christian’s mission is to seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (justice), and to pray earnestly for the realization of these on earth as in heaven (Matt. 6.33, 10). The Gospel of the Kingdom is the entry point, not just for saving souls, but for taking up the whole work of the divine economy, an economy devoted to justice rather than material wealth. And, while Christians understand that not all their neighbors will share in their commitment to Christ and His Kingdom, still, the Lord intends the blessings of His Law to reach to all the “coastlands” of the world.

The world may have little use for something called the divine economy. But for Christians to fulfill our calling and realize the fullness of God’s Kingdom, no other framework or objective will suffice.

Our task in the Christian community, therefore, is to consider the best ways of bringing the justice of God to light and employing it to direct and prevail in public life. Justice, not material prosperity, is the standard which drives the divine economy, and which the Law of God facilitates. And to this end, believers must bring the Law of God into every area of human relationships, roles, and responsibilities.

For reflection

1. Our calling in the divine economy extends to more than getting people saved. Explain.
2. Those who are saved aim higher than material wealth as the defining focus of their lives. What goals, motives, or standards drive the divine economy?
3. Why is it not a good idea that Christians simply “go along to get along” in an economy based on material wealth?

Next steps—Preparation: Spend a season in prayer asking the Lord to clarify what it means for you to take love as the end, framework, and currency of all areas of your life.

2 Private Property

“You shall not steal.” Deuteronomy 5.19

For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? 1 Corinthians 4.7

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. James 1.17

Property in the divine economy

In our nation today, property is a primary measure of prosperity and wellbeing. Property is to be sought, acquired, developed, used, and enjoyed as central to realizing the hope and promise of an economics of material wealth.

Next to life and liberty, the right to private property is the most cherished right of practically every American.

The teaching of God’s Word, however—beginning in His Law—is along different lines. In the divine economy, an economy based not on material wealth but on justice and love, private property is a gift and trust from God. Individuals do indeed have a right to private property, and wealth is not an evil per se. But only within the framework of justice and love, which characterize the divine economy, can people realize the full purpose and potential of the property entrusted to them by God.

We see this in Israel’s having plundered the Egyptians. The people of Israel were slaves in Egypt. They possessed almost nothing of their own. However, they came out of Egypt laden with all manner of material goods, provided for them by the judgment of God against their oppressors. God expected His people to use this material prosperity to sustain themselves and their neighbors and to honor Him during their sojourn in the wilderness.

We also discern this view of property in Israel’s acquiring lands and farms and cities in the land of Canaan which they did not cultivate, sow, or build. God caused the wicked nations of Canaan to forfeit the goods He had entrusted to them, and He gave all their possessions into the hands of His people as a gift and trust.

We also see this view of property in the instructions in God’s Law concerning tithes, gleaning, respect for the property of neighbors, proper use of the land, and the return of property to original owners during Sabbath years. The people of Israel were to understand, as the apostles explained, that all their property had come to them from God. It was given to them as a trust, and they were ultimately accountable to Him for the use they made of His good gifts. Each person’s allotment of property was their own possession before the Lord, but not merely for their own indulgence or enrichment. Neighbors were expected to care for one another with their property, to respect one another’s property, and to be content with, and make the best use of, the property entrusted to them by the Lord.

The Christian view of property

But at all times the people of Israel were to remember that God alone, the Giver of every good and perfect gift, could define the right use of private property. This same understanding carried over into the Christian era. The Christian understands that he is not his own; he has been bought with the blood of Jesus Christ and all that he is and has, having come from the Lord, belongs ultimately to the Lord and is to be used in such a way as to reflect the interests of divine justice and love (1 Cor. 3.21-23; 4.7; 6.19, 20).

All our property—every good and perfect gift entrusted to us by God—is to be used, therefore, in a manner

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that will redound to the glory of God (Matt. 25.14-30). Our approach to private property must not be seen, in the first instance, as something with which to enrich ourselves, but as something to invest for the love of God and neighbors.

Of course, we must use our property in a responsible manner to meet our needs and the needs of those entrusted to our care. But beyond this, God requires that we use all our property to demonstrate love for Him and for our neighbors. We must hold our property as though it were not, in fact, our own (Acts 4.32). Instead, we must see ourselves as stewards of God's property and be ready to use His gifts for furthering His Kingdom, building His Church, and the meeting our neighbor's material needs.

In the divine economy, material prosperity is a resource for loving God and neighbor, not for indulging one's fleshly passions. And we need not fear, as we use our private property in such ways, that we shall ever be in want; God is able to supply all our needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4.19).

Property and the larger community

Within the Christian community material wealth is to be used for the love of God and neighbors. Within the larger community Christians must demonstrate individual and community lives of charity, self-denial, and service.

Further, we must work for and support public policy initiatives that maximize individual freedom and responsibility in the use of private property, and that protect the right of each individual to exercise stewardship of their property without fear of encroachment from neighbors or government.

Especially should Christians resist efforts of the State to presume to know best how to use private wealth to maximize material happiness for all. Systems of taxation which impose unequal burdens on the wealthy can become little more than a means for politicians to purchase the support of those who are favored by their arbitrary manipulation of the tax codes.

Christians must work to express the *divine* economy within an economics of *material wealth*. By our lives and witness we must consistently declare that the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it (Ps. 24.1), and that we are all to be held accountable before the judgment seat of Him with Whom we have to do (Heb. 4.13).

All property is a blessing from God, to be used for His purposes in advancing His reign of love on earth as it is in heaven. All property must be received as a trust, invested and used with love, and valued as a means to the end of advancing Christ's Kingdom, and not merely for personal indulgence or enrichment. And while such a view of property may not be *de rigueur* in our materialistic age, it is the very warp and woof of the divine economy.

For reflection

1. What do we mean by saying that private property is a gift and trust from the Lord?
2. Look at Acts 2.44, 45 and Acts 4.32-35. What do we learn here about how the first Christians regarded private property?
3. Private property can become a hindrance in knowing and serving the Lord. Explain.

Next steps—Preparation: In prayer, thank God specifically for the property He has entrusted to you. Ask Him to help you learn how to use all your possessions in a manner consistent with His purposes.

3 Individual Responsibility

“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.” Leviticus 19:18

Looking to government

In an economy based on material prosperity, people increasingly look to government to ensure a “fair” and “just” distribution of available wealth. This is increasingly so in our day, in what Christopher Caldwell has dubbed *The Age of Entitlement*.

Taxes and tax breaks, welfare and other forms of public assistance, set-asides of various kinds, special consideration in matters of hiring, firing, and promotion—these are ways people whose primary devotion is to getting-and-spending look to government to help maximize their wellbeing.

Politicians delight to play this game, for it allows them to explore endless possibilities for gaining the support of various constituencies through the manipulation of public policy. In the American economy, government presumes to be the arbiter of all things “good” and “fair” and “just.” It possesses the power to enforce its views and to shuffle and distribute resources according to its preferences and policies.

Governments thus compel those who have means to yield those means to the State for its purposes in “spreading the wealth” around. The State thus violates individual responsibility, taking away the freedom to steward personal property as people see fit and, especially, as accountable to God alone.

In an economy based on material prosperity, governments can nevertheless do much good. But government policies can also result in loss of freedom and the cancellation of individual responsibility. Thus, we need the influence of the divine economy to check and guide public policy.

Love your neighbor—freely

In the divine economy, people seek the wisdom of God to use their resources in a manner consistent with His instructions and commandments. Love for God and neighbor, as we have said, are the guiding economic principles. People stand or fall before God according to the economics of justice and love outlined in His Law. They must be free to exercise stewardship unto God, and government should pursue policies that allow this to be so.

Christians can be moved to exercise proper stewardship and responsibility by the loving instruction and example of their fellow believers. Those beyond the pale of faith are still accountable to God for the use they make of His good gifts—time, strength, property, and wealth. However, if they cannot be moved to do good by the teaching and example of the Church or the fear of public disapproval, they may be required to do so, at least in certain areas, by government, as it serves God according to His good purposes. For example, someone may prefer to exercise their supposed freedom by driving however they like on public highways; good government, however, will enforce laws that require drivers to take responsibility for the safety of all.

Of course, any use of property or individual freedom which directly transgresses the Law of God and assaults the freedom or usurps the responsibility of one’s neighbor should be regarded as a breach of justice, and appropriate redress must be made. We must love our neighbors as ourselves. Respecting our neighbors’ freedom and encouraging individual responsibility are nothing more than what we would like for ourselves.

The road to justice

In other times the hard work of those within the divine economy, together with the “peer pressure” they have been able to bring to bear, have exerted strong influence. Against steep odds, they have encouraged people to

respect their neighbors and exercise individual responsibility in ways consistent with the requirements of the divine economy, even when people may not have been eager to do so (cf. Ps. 81.15). The abolition of slavery and the civil rights movement are prime examples of how public policy can be changed to reflect the values of the divine economy over those of the materialistic economy and thereby to create a more just society.

The movement to free slaves and to reform public manners in early 19th-century England, led by William Wilberforce, and in America by abolitionists North and South, and the civil rights movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—each of these largely supported by Christians—demonstrate how the courage, persistence, and persuasion of the believing community can move a society toward a greater measure of goodness and justice. As Dr. King wrote, “A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law” (*Letter from a Birmingham Jail*). Through the efforts of abolitionists and civil rights advocates, responsibility for respecting—if not loving—one’s neighbor was restored, albeit gradually and grudgingly in many quarters. Unjust laws were identified and replaced by laws more reflective of the teaching of God’s Word through a combination of lawful public procedure and just acts of civil disobedience.

In America, copious amounts of blood and treasure were expended to achieve justice for the enslaved—an example of a just war, of government wielding the sword for good. And more sacrifice was required on the part of those, including Dr. King, who understood that unjust laws and policies, restricting individual liberty and discouraging neighbor love, must be replaced.

The road to justice, following the tenets of the divine economy, is not always an easy way.

Over time, minds and hearts changed to reflect new public policies. Those movements have so affected the public outlook that we look askance on any who seek to perpetuate the evils those movements overturned. Of course, in a sinful world, much abuse and injustice remain. This will always be the case, thus heightening the need for a people whose economic interests are moral and spiritual more than material.

In the divine economy people are responsible to act in loving and just ways toward their neighbors. Governments and other policymaking forums can do much good by encouraging citizenship that promotes individual responsibility and mutual respect in line with the teaching of God’s Law. But they will need the counsel, energy, and persuasive power of those whose first commitment is to God and the economy He intends for a good society.

For reflection

1. How does individual responsibility operate within the divine economy? What is the basis for individual responsibility?
2. Why must government sometimes curtail individual responsibility? What standard should guide it when it does?
3. Where does the Christian turn to understand the limits and obligations of individual responsibility?

Next steps—Transformation: Which economy—materialistic or divine—provides the guidance for your life? What examples can you cite to support your answer? Where do you see the need for more of the divine economy in your life?

4 Relationships

“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.” Leviticus 19:18

“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” Deuteronomy 6:6, 7

The divine economy

We’re looking at some of the fundamental components of the divine economy, the overall social paradigm outlined in the Law of God and more fully developed throughout the pages of Scripture. An “economy” is simply a system or program for using and managing a wide range of variables in the most beneficial way. We have seen that the divine economy concentrates on justice and love rather than the acquisition of wealth as its primary objective and driving force. It is not hostile to wealth; rather, in the divine economy the attainment and enjoyment of material prosperity is always subordinate to, and a means for, loving God and neighbor.

We’ve also seen that, in the divine economy, private property and individual responsibility are regarded as gifts of God to be used to the ends of love and justice. Loving one’s neighbor means using one’s resources in ways that consider the needs and rights of others, and not just one’s own interests or pursuits.

Which leads naturally to the fourth component of the divine economy, and that is a right understanding of relationships, how people get along with each other in community.

Mutual edification and assistance

In an economy based on material wealth, people *compete* with one another for resources, opportunities, and advantages. In capitalist economies the belief is that, as people compete, they improve one another materially, so that the rising tide of wealth lifts all boats. When people use their private property responsibly—with a view not just to their own interests but to those of the larger community as well—this is what often happens, the result of what Adam Smith referred to as an “invisible hand.”

However, as often as not—and increasingly so in our day—economies based on competition tend toward the promotion of self-interest at the expense of everyone else. Economics meshes with politics to advance the status and fortunes of the few, while the many are left to do the best they can for themselves, and often look to political solutions to improve or protect their material wellbeing. Governments are thus induced to create policies to “share the wealth” or constrain the worst kinds of workplace abuses, so that those with means are not entirely free to follow their selfish interests at the expense of others.

All such public policies—those which protect the rights of responsible people to maximize their resources, and those which guard individuals against the indifferent or self-serving ways of others—reflect a deeper sense of justice which remains in the soul of each person and bears witness to the human longing for a different kind of economics.

In an economy of justice, people *work together* to bring the righteousness, peace, and joy of God’s Kingdom into the experience of all members of the community. Gaining advantage is replaced by seeking opportunities to serve; self-interest is replaced by self-denial; mutual edification and assistance take the place of self-aggrandizement.

A nation of narcissists

America has been described as a nation of narcissists, a people whose primary concern, in the memorable

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phrase of Robert Ringer, is “looking out for number one.” This is not by accident, but by design. It is in part a consequence of the Darwinian worldview which defines the nature of relationships in terms of fitness, survival, and competition.

But it is also the natural outworking of our lust for material prosperity. From early on children are taught to seek their interests above all and to do what they can to gain the advantage over their peers. Education—in home and school—reinforces the belief that children should be happy and that material prosperity is the way to happiness. Other people may be enjoyed as friends or intimates, but they must not be allowed to disrupt the quest for personal happiness. Abortion, divorce, and child-neglect are classic examples of how self-interest, which always includes material considerations, works to the disadvantage of the weak.

Relationships in the divine economy

In the divine economy, husbands and wives resist the temptation to self-interest and work together to fulfill their marriage vows. Divorce would be rare, but not prohibited, in such an economy, abortion would be all but non-existent, and raising children would be regarded as a privilege and an investment in the future of God’s Kingdom. In the worldview grounded in God’s Law, fathers and mothers take responsibility for raising their children to inculcate neighbor-love above mere self-interest. Children learn the Law of God and all His Word to discipline their hearts and minds so that *loving* their neighbors, rather than always looking for some *edge* over them, becomes the default manner of living.

In such an economy, neighbors look out for one another, and fairness and honesty prevail in the marketplace. Where justice and love take precedence over material wealth, generosity, charity, compassion, and altruism are more likely to flourish. The fact that, year after year, the Christian community proves to be the most generous in giving their time, strength, and wealth for the relief of the needy is typical of what we might expect to see in an economy of justice and love.

Where a people values justice—a community based on and expressing love for God and neighbors—above wealth, every type of relationship will be transformed. In the Book of Acts, Christians demonstrated the power of such an economy in astonishing ways; and by so doing, they convinced even some of their most hardened opponents to believe the Gospel of the Kingdom (cf. Acts 6.1-7).

The place to begin working for such an economy is in the Christian home and church. From there, as believers model the relational power of an economy of justice and love, they may encourage public policies that allow the benefits of such an economy to redound to all members of the community.

For reflection

1. How would you summarize the difference between how we think about relationships in a materialistic economy as opposed to the divine economy?
2. Is it unrealistic to expect that the Christian view of relationships could have more influence in our day? Explain.
3. What is your role in pursuing relationships according to the divine economy?

Next steps—Transformation: Review the relationships you have with the people in your life. Are they more self-serving or others-serving? How can you bring more of the divine economy to bear in your relationships?

5 Community and Government

“You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the LORD your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment. You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD your God is giving you.” Deuteronomy 16.18-20

Local and national government

In the divine economy—the economics of justice and love outlined in God’s Law—effective government begins at the local level. The outgrowth of home and the guardian of property and neighborly relationships, local government in the divine economy has priority of place in ensuring the workings of the divine economy by exemplifying, encouraging, and, when necessary, enforcing individual responsibility for the requirements of justice.

The Law of God does not envision a large national government which has as its primary purpose regulating the affairs of the nation to maximize material prosperity for all. That national government would be required in Israel is anticipated by God’s allowing the people to have a king (Deut. 17). But we note there the strict constraints placed on that central authority. The primary function of the king seems to have been to protect and oversee the affairs of the nation and to ensure that the divine economy is in good working order throughout the communities of the land. That scarcely a single king in Israel’s history managed consistently to fulfill this role bears witness both to the sinfulness of men and the sinful tendencies of national governments.

In the Law of God, primary authority was invested in local governments, in the form of judges and other officials, for ensuring that justice prevailed in all the towns and villages of Israel.

Local government in the Law of God

Local officials were selected (Hebrew, *nathan*—to set, appoint, or put in place) by the people they would serve, presumably, on the basis of character and their understanding of the Law of God and the traditions and promises of God’s people. These elders or judges met in the gates of the city, where, symbolically, their deliberations and actions could be observed as they protected the city against injustice, and where, as well, people could learn to live according to God’s Law by seeing them at work.

The Law of God envisions “sunshine” government at the local level, government in plain site of the people, with an informed “electorate” serving to fulfill, monitor, and preserve the integrity of local self-government.

As we see in Ruth 4, officials could be assembled at the wish of a member of a community to render a judgment in some matter or dispute. Undoubtedly, however, they also met with some regularity, perhaps to review the overall state of the divine economy in their community, and to discuss matters related to understanding the Law of God.

Government as shepherd

The local rulers of Israel were to regard themselves as “shepherds” of the people, who were the flocks of God (cf. Ezek. 34.1-10). As such, their duty was to care for the wellbeing of each member of the community, to do whatever the Law of God directed to ensure that the benefits of justice and neighbor-love flowed to all.

It should not surprise us that, in the economics of material wealth that dominates our society, rulers are more likely to be regarded as wolves in sheep’s clothing than shepherds of their constituents, although certainly much of that Biblical idea of government is still in evidence.

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There are many benefits to granting the burden of governance to officers elected at the community level. Here, for example, we might more reasonably expect officials to regard themselves as the servants and shepherds of people they recognize as neighbors and friends, rather than merely constituents in some far-flung district or state.

Local officials should also be able better to understand the needs of their constituents than representatives in a far-off national capital. In the early days of the American experience, city and county government were much more important than at present. For example, school boards existed in every political precinct to serve the interests and needs of parents in that district for the education of their children, and every school was allowed to select curricula and teachers to fit its peculiar needs and concerns. In colonial America, for example, a schoolteacher in New York City was expected to know the Scripture and to be able to lead children in daily devotions. Similar requirements existed in other colonial jurisdictions.

Checking corruption in government should also be more easily achieved at the local level. It is certainly much easier at the local level to raise a concern with a local official, or to recall one when necessary. Further, we might expect to see citizens' review boards operating to watch over the policies of local rulers and their interpretations of community norms of justice.

Decline in local government

Over the past 200 years government in America has become increasingly centralized, as Americans have come to believe that a strong central government is the best way to ensure maximum material prosperity for all. In other words, the worst fears of the Anti-Federalist writers are now coming to pass.

The result is that federal and state governments wield vastly more power than local officials. And, while wealth has increased in America, justice has suffered considerably and a mindset of entitlement has settled on increasing numbers of the nation's people.

Meanwhile, how many Americans even bother to pay attention to or participate in local politics? For whom did you vote in the last county or city council election?

Just government begins in just self-government, learned from God's Law, taught in Christian homes, practiced at the local level, and encoded, when possible, in the public policies of the land. There is a need, of course, for national governments. But these must keep in mind the primacy of local governments to oversee the outworking of the divine economy for the people in their care.

For reflection

1. At the very least, Christians should pay more attention to local government. Explain.
2. How many forms of local government exist in your community? Councils? Boards? How should you pray for these (1 Tim. 2.1-8)?
3. What about the board that governs your church? Do you pray for the members of that body? What are some things you should pray for them?

Next steps—Transformation: Make it a point to pray for your local forms of government. Pray for each board or council and, as you are able, learn who serves on them and pray for them as well.

6 National Government

“When you come to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me, you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother.”
Deuteronomy 17.14, 15

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good. Romans 13.1-4

A king in Israel

The oft-repeated lamentation of the book of Judges—“at that time there was no king in Israel; everyone did that which was right in his own eyes”—shows what can happen when national government is nonexistent or indifferent to the ends of justice and love. That time of lawlessness, violence, and vigilantism nearly ruined the nation and people of Israel. No wonder that, toward the end of that period, the people demanded a king to rule over them.

One of the important functions of the national government God provided for the people of Israel was to ensure a framework within which justice, according to the Law of God, would prevail throughout the land. Israel’s king was to know the Law of God, to live and exemplify the model of justice, and to serve as the highest bar of appeal in bringing the benefits of that Law to the people. Solomon showed what the potential for such a Biblical national government might be in 1 Kings 10.

There is certainly a role for national government in the divine economy outlined in God’s Law. A national government is important for such areas as national defense, suppressing evil, maintaining a sound currency, facilitating transportation and commerce, and serving as a final bar of appeal as required in questions of justice.

A limited vision

The objective of America’s national government, as expressed in the preamble to our Constitution, is “to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity...” Here we note but scant mention of material wealth. The focus instead is on union, tranquility, justice, wellbeing, defense, and security.

The objectives outlined in the United States Constitution are appropriate to the limited role of national government the founders of our republic envisioned, and much more in line with an economics of justice and love than an economics of material prosperity. The Constitution was drafted not to “spread the wealth around” but to maintain a secure and united national framework of justice and opportunity against all threats, domestic and international.

A more perfect union?

Would we say that our national government today has brought us to “a more perfect Union”? The nation is divided racially, economically, ideologically, and regionally against itself in a struggle for material advantage.

Would we say that this government is primarily concerned to “establish Justice” when, in fact, no working definition of justice is agreed upon by the different political factions? Our government works to “insure domestic Tranquility,” but this is mainly the responsibility of local officials, who often turn blind eyes to civil

disobedience for ideological or political reasons. The national government has done a good job in working to “provide for the common defence” of the republic. However, at least in this observer’s view, it takes a far too aggressive view of what it means “to promote the general Welfare”. The reams and reams of regulations, codes, and other forms of public policy by which the national government seeks to “spread the wealth around” are more a hindrance to “the Blessings of Liberty” than a help.

And as for “our Posterity”, the government sponsors one of the least effective programs of education in the developed world, divides people ideologically and racially, plunders the inheritances of heirs, and routinely puts the overall wellbeing of the money economy in doubt by its policies of taxation and regulation. In addition, it has encumbered the generations to come with a burden of debt which seems unlikely to go away any time soon.

This is not the form of national government envisioned in the Law of God or the mind of Paul.

Recovering a limited national government

We need a national government, to be sure, and in the divine economy national governments are no less important than local governments. However, our present experiment in ever-expanding national government has become more a burden on the nation than a boon. Government is today the largest employer, creating a burden of taxation to support itself, and an equal burden of laws and regulations to justify its existence. America needs a strong national government, but not one that, by its sheer weight and size, merely gives the appearance of strength. Strength in national government is a function of justice, not size.

We need a government more like that envisioned and established by the founders of this country, and less like the one that presently is devoting most of its efforts to ensure that autonomy and prosperity are the privilege and possession of all Americans, whatever it takes.

The present course of national government in America portends ruin for the nation in the future. We need a new vision of the future, one rooted in and focused on justice and love, and a reformed national government to help us along the way to that vision. It may take generations to recover a proper national government, but it will not happen unless some begin seeking and working for it.

For reflection

1. What can Christians do to return our national government to a more Biblical framework?
2. Do you think this is possible? Can we make a difference, even though it takes a generation or more? If you do, if you really think God can use us in this way, what will you do to make it so?
3. What will be the likely result if believers fail to be more active in all the arenas where public policy is forged?

Next steps—Transformation: Add something to your prayers, your conversation, and your work that is aimed at bringing more of the goodness and glory of God into the workings of our national government.

7 The Future

“You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD your God is giving you.” Deuteronomy 16.19, 20

An unstable pillar

As mentioned in an earlier installment, and as is becoming increasingly clear amid our present economic and political situation, material wealth can be a most unstable pillar on which to build one’s happiness.

When retirement accounts erode, property values decline, jobs evaporate, the national debt mounts, and the value of the currency declines, many Americans question whether our economics of materialism, as we have been pursuing it in recent generations, can continue to produce the good life we envision. The cries to raise taxes on the wealthy to fund the dependent and the entitled are little more than stop-gap thinking on the part of those desperate to ensure social stability and political power for the present.

But a capitalist economy cannot assure a safe and prosperous future. All who put their trust in wealth and things are destined to be disappointed, if not ruined. The wellbeing of the future will be built, not on material wealth, but on justice and the principles of the divine economy, as outlined in the Law and Word of God.

Scripture is given to equip us for every good work, and that includes how we live now as well as how we work for the future (2 Tim. 3.15-17).

The pursuit of justice

As long as the notion of justice in our society is treated as little more than a handmaiden to material wealth, the realization of true justice—love for God and neighbor—will continue to elude us. While Christians do not deny the legitimacy of material wealth, the pursuit of prosperity must not be the guiding factor in our lives or in the kinds of public policies we seek for our nation. Christians believe that justice—and its mirror image, righteousness—must be the defining norm of any economy. Justice is not defined by changeable social norms or the *spiritus mundi*, but by the unchanging Word of God and His Spirit, beginning with the Law of God.

In a just economy neighbor love will be the guiding principle. Children will be educated in the primacy of neighbor-love. Culture will reflect the dignity of human life and promote justice rather than self-indulgence. Government will function not as an advocate for equality of wealth, but as a promoter of the general welfare by ensuring that justice is the defining norm of all public policy.

The pursuit of justice, Biblically-defined, will increase our realization of a good society. The Law of God will save no one; however, keeping the Law, and working for public policies in line with God’s Word, will bring the blessings of God to His people, and through them, to their neighbors (Jer. 29.4-7).

The challenge of justice

An economics based on justice will go further toward ensuring a secure future than an economics based on material wealth. If such an economics—such a divine economy—is to have a more significant role in determining the course of America’s future, it must begin in the lives of those who understand the nature and value of justice and who seek it through the Gospel of the Kingdom. Unless we in the Christian community live and teach justice, righteousness, and love for God and neighbors as the guiding principles of our lives and culture, the land we inhabit will continue to wither and fade under the vain but persistent hope that we’ll all be better off someday soon.

The future wellbeing of this or any nation lies not in the amount and distribution of its material wealth, but in the degree of its devotion to, and the extent of its practice of justice, as defined by the Law of God and all His Word. We must firmly, boldly, and lovingly insist on this and work diligently to realize it in our lives and in all the policymaking arenas we inhabit.

Thus far in our series on the Law of God and public policy we have focused on the *prolegomena*—as theologians say, the foundational assumptions and principles—that must guide us in working through our subject. We began by examining *the abiding validity of the Law of God*, rightly understood, for speaking into this aspect of our national life. From there we examined *various loci* within which public policy is forged and practiced in our society, and we saw that many opportunities exist for members of “we the people” to exercise our civic responsibility for forming just public policies. Next, we examined the teaching of God’s Law concerning *the true nature of justice*, and saw that justice represents the expression in human society of the loving and true character of God. On that basis, then, we outlined *a Biblical view of the good society*, and explained *the nature of a divine economy* as the preferred means for achieving such a society.

A preview

These “first things” settled, we turn to consider specific areas of public policymaking. We will begin, in our next segment, to unpack aspects of Biblical teaching, primarily within the Law of God, concerning the kinds of public policies that contribute to a good society and can help to ensure a future based on justice. Our discussions will survey, in outline form only: money, wealth, and economics; caring for the poor, immigrants and immigration; life issues; the environment; and education.

This is by no means an exhaustive catalog of public policy matters. However, our hope is that considering these topics will help us learn to think about policy matters from the perspective of the divine economy in core areas of our common life, so that we begin to develop a perspective and mindset for considering other matters as well. In a final installment we will return to the question of the *loci* of policymaking for an overview of the many opportunities available to believers to bring Kingdom values to bear on life in our society.

The focus of our discussions will be on the Law of God, which, as we showed at the beginning of this series, is regarded by the writers of the New Testament as containing abiding principles of justice for pursuing the divine economy and a good society, and which our forebears in this American experiment held in high regard for just those ends.

The Law of God is the acorn to the oak of divine revelation. The fact that it is neglected by most, despised by many, and virtually unknown by all but a few makes our consideration of the Law’s use in forging public policy for a good society all the more important.

For Reflection

1. What principles guide your thoughts about the future of this nation?
2. What does your church teach to help parishioners think about the future from the perspective of the divine economy?
3. What’s the most important lesson you have learned thus far in our series on the Law of God and public policy?

Next steps—Conversation: Share your answer to question 3 with a friend, and encourage your friend to review [the previous studies in this series](#) and join you for those that remain.

The Divine Economy

For reflection or discussion

1. What do we mean by the “divine economy”?
2. How does the divine economy differ from a materialist economy? What are its main objectives?
3. In the divine economy, what is the role of civil government?
4. Why does the divine economy offer a more hopeful future than the materialist economy?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this part of our study of “The Law of God and Public Policy”?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.