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JESUS' LEGACY TO HIS PEOPLE: THE WORLD

by Gary North

A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just (Proverbs 13:22).

Using Ray Sutton's outline in his forthcoming book, *That Ye May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, we can say that the fifth and final principle of a biblical covenant is **the principle of legitimacy-inheritance**. It could also be called the principle of continuity. In the field of economics, the principle of inheritance governs the transfer of wealth from parents to children. But the biblical model of this family transfer is the transfer of property from God to His people.

Adam and Eve were given the garden of Eden to subdue and guard (Genesis 2). They were to use this experience as a training period; from the garden, they were to go out and subdue the whole world. Note: **possession was not automatic**. They had been given the whole world as their lawful legacy from God, but they could not possess it free of charge. They had to earn it, just as children are supposed to demonstrate their competence before taking possession of the family inheritance.

The First-Born Son

Adam was the first-born earthly son of God, made in his Father's image (Genesis 1:26-27). The New Testament records the family line of Jesus, and ends with Adam, who "was the son of God" (Luke 3:38). The words "son of" were inserted by the translators of the King James edition, but this really was the meaning of the Greek. In tracing Jesus' lineage, the Greek reads: "Joseph, which was [the son] of Heli, which was [the son] of Matthat. . .," all the way back to Adam. The use of the word "of" implies fatherhood. Adam was the son of God.

Adam forfeited his sonship by rebelling against his Father. He became a disinherited son. From that point on, the only way to full sonship before God was by **adoption**. God chooses people to enter into His covenanted family, regenerating them by His grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). This is why the Gospel of John announces in the first chapter, concerning Jesus Christ: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12).

When Adam placed himself ethically under the domination of Satan, he thereby gave Satan an opportunity to steal Adam's original inheritance. Adam was now legally dead in God's eyes. He had forfeited his inheritance. Satan immediately took possession of the world as a **squatter possesses**, meaning until the lawful heir returns to claim his stolen inheritance.

His speedy capture of Adam's inheritance has done him little good since Calvary. It will eventually lead to his final

judgment. "An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed" (Proverbs 20:21).

Through grace, God adopted the Hebrews as His people, and gave them the land of Canaan as their inheritance. In this small bit of real estate in the Middle East, God established His temporary earthly headquarters for the reconquest of the earth.

Jesus Is the Lawful Heir

Jesus Christ is the second-born earthly Son, but the first-born eternal Son, who was with God the Father from the beginning (John 1:1-5). Paul called Him "the last Adam," in contrast to the first Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45). It is He who rightfully inherited what would have been Adam's legacy. Through His perfect obedience to the law of God, He proved Himself to be the lawful heir of the Father.

He announced this in His parable of the absentee landlord. It assumes the original ownership of the world by God. "There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let [leased] it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it" (Matthew 21:33-34). Clearly, God owns the field because He created it. He even stocked it with capital assets.

"And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise" (21:35-36). The husbandmen were thieves. They wanted the fruits of the field. They were appropriating the land and its fruits "in the name of the People." No more would the distant landlord exploit them!

"But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said amongst themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him" (21:37-39). The husbandmen imitated God, who had cast Adam out of the garden. The Jews later fulfilled His parable when they dragged Him from the garden of Gethsemane into a "kangaroo court," tried Him, and then had Him executed by the Roman authorities.¹

What was the point of the parable? That the Jews had slain the prophets, and would slay Him, too. Judgment would come soon thereafter. "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a na-

1. Gary North, *The Sinai Strategy: Economics and the Ten Commandments* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1986), pp. xxiii-xxiv.

tion bringing forth the fruits thereof" (21:43). In short, they had **forfeited their inheritance**. They had imitated Adam, rebelled, and would be scattered. They were the expropriators, and God promised to expropriate them.

The implication was world-transforming: **Christ's people have inherited the kingdom. This kingdom is the whole world.**

Jesus and the Jubilee Year

Jesus began His public ministry when He entered the synagogue at Nazareth, and stood up to read the scroll of the Book of Isaiah which had been handed to Him. He read from the section we designate today as Isaiah 61. Jesus read these words: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor: he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19). Then He handed the scroll back to the priest and sat down. He announced to them, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (4:21).

What had the passage referred to? The jubilee year. What was the jubilee year? Legally and historically, it was an aspect of the military conquest of the land of Canaan. Symbolically, it was an aspect of God's deliverance of His people.

Before the Hebrews captured Canaan, God set up a reward system for the participants in this military invasion. He set up what the politicians call a spoils system. The families that participated in the war would inherit specific pieces of land, tribe by tribe. This had nothing to do with any socialistic scheme of retroactive land redistribution.² The future division was outlined by Moses before they came into the land (Numbers 34-36). The only tribe which could not inherit permanent land was the priestly tribe, the Levites. They could hold land only in the cities (Numbers 35:2-7). The jubilee affected them differently (Leviticus 25:32-34).

As an incentive to fight, each family was guaranteed permanent ownership. They were not allowed to dispossess their future biological heirs. Every fifty years, each parcel of land had to be returned to the lawful bloodline heir of the original family. This was supposed to take place in the famous jubilee year, which is described in Leviticus 25. (There is no historic or biblical evidence that the jubilee year was ever celebrated.)

The jubilee year followed the seventh sabbatical year in a series: the fiftieth year. Every seventh (sabbatical) year, all debts were cancelled for Hebrew debtors, all Hebrew slaves were set free, and the land rested—no planting or harvesting (Deuteronomy 15). The seven sabbatical cycles pointed to the coming year of complete deliverance, when the family's land was returned to the lawful heir from anyone who had temporarily leased it. Families that had lost their land were given hope.

In short, the jubilee year was **the year which restored the family's lost inheritance**. It symbolized the year of full deliverance. It symbolized the restoration of all things.

Christians as the Heirs

God had transferred title to the land of Canaan when He promised Abraham that his heirs would inherit it (Genesis 15:7). They didn't possess it for four generations, as God predicted (15:16). Possession of the inheritance was not automatic.

The land of conquered Canaan was supposed to serve the Hebrews as the garden was to have served Adam: as a training ground. They were to use it as a base of operations in a world-wide program of conquest—**conquest by ethics**. Jonah's ministry was the great Old Testament example. But

the Hebrews failed in this task of world-wide evangelism. Satan remained the squatter-inheritor of the world.

When Jesus announced the beginning of His public ministry by proclaiming the fulfillment of the jubilee year, He was thereby announcing the transfer of title: **from the deceased Adam to God's incarnate Son**. What was listed on that deed? **The whole world**. Jesus was claiming His inheritance as God's legitimate son. Satan the squatter was put on notice: the heir has come.

Jesus went out and fulfilled the terms of Isaiah 61: He comforted the broken-hearted, healed the sick, and set spiritual captives free. Then He died on the cross.

The Old Testament laws of inheritance designated the **brothers** of the deceased as the lawful heirs, if he left behind neither a wife nor children (Numbers 27:9). Who are Jesus' lawful heirs? His ethical followers. "And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold, my mother and my brethren!" (Matthew 12:49). Those who are **ethically disciplined** by Jesus are the heirs of His inheritance.

This means that **Christians have legally inherited the world**. This is why Jesus commanded His followers to go out and **disciple** (discipline) the nations (Matthew 28:18). **They are to claim their inheritance in His name**.

The basis today for Christians' collecting their lawful inheritance is diligent work, moral faithfulness to God and man, and building up their families' capital base. They are to earn their inheritance in the same way that Adam was supposed to earn it: **by dominion**. They must prove themselves faithful sons.

The jubilee year was fulfilled by Christ, as He announced. The 50-year land tenure cycle is abolished forever, just as the slaying of animals in the Temple is abolished forever. Jesus fulfilled the terms of the jubilee year. The Jews' inheritance in Palestine was taken from them. There is no more need for the jubilee year as a means of land tenure, for there is no more inheritance based on the original military conquest of Canaan. We have a better jubilee today: **world dominion**. We hold title to the whole world; now we need to fulfill the terms of the dominion assignment in order to prove ourselves faithful sons.

Responsible Sonship

The system of inheritance in the Old Testament was based on a fundamental principle: the **legitimate heir** is the **responsible heir**. Normally, the first-born son inherited a double portion (Deuteronomy 21:17). That is, the inheritance would be divided up in terms of its value among the sons, with an added unit. If a man had six sons, the inheritance would be divided into seven parts, with the eldest son inheriting two units.

Why a double portion? Because the eldest son would have the greatest responsibility for the support of the parents. Why not give the daughters an inheritance? They **did** receive the inheritance, if there were no surviving sons (Numbers 27:1-11). If there were sons, they didn't inherit. Why not? Because they were to be given a dowry at the time of marriage. Their husbands were responsible for the support of a different set of parents. Presumably, if a son-in-law agreed to contribute to the support of her parents, then he could become a legitimate heir.

Consider what this meant for the first-born son. He would be required to take care of his parents in their old age. He was therefore entitled to the double portion. The parents understood that they could not live forever. They understood that they were under the curse of God because of the sin of Adam. They therefore had to make preparations with respect to the building up of capital, and to see to it that in their old age, their children would have sufficient capital to support them. The children, on the other hand, understood this responsibility, and they looked forward to inheriting whatever was left over after their parents had died.

2. Gary North, "The Fulfillment of the Jubilee Year," *Biblical Economics Today*, VI (April/May, 1983).

Two-Way Responsibility

This system of inheritance involved two-way responsibility. The first-born son knew that he would be the one most responsible for the parents, and he also knew that he would inherit a double portion. The other children accepted the fact that they would not inherit as much as the first born son, but on the other hand, they didn't have equal responsibility for the care of the parents. In short, **from him to whom much is given, much is expected** (Luke 12:48).

The parents had to look to the future in order to build up a capital base for their children. The children had to be careful in the accumulation and maintenance of that capital base, so that they would not have to dip into their own resources in order to support the parents in old age. Both generations realized that they had mutual responsibilities to each other. The father-son relationship or the parent-child relationship was not simply an emotional relationship; it was also covenantal, legal, and economic.

For both parent and child, the family's capital meant a long-term, future-oriented set of responsibilities. Parents understood that one of their goals on earth was to pass down a godly inheritance to the children, but since they knew that their children would be responsible for them in their old age, they also had to pass down a knowledge of God's laws and understanding of God's sovereignty. The Proverbs announced that it's the responsibility of parents to train up a child in the way that he should go, and in his old age, the child would not abandon his responsibilities (Proverbs 22:6).

God warned parents to teach their children the law of God: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). Faithful parents recognized that they had an obligation both to themselves and to the community at large that their children would be instructed in the word of God.

Faithfulness to God's law was the basis of inheritance in Israel. It was the realization that parents owed the children a godly inheritance, and that children owed the parents a safe retirement. Thus, there was no radical generation gap, because **the basis of mutual service was the word of God**. Each group could expect payment from the other. At the same time, each group understood its obligations to the other. It was a manifestation of the biblical principle that **success comes through service** (Mark 9:35), and that capital comes through long-term **efficient** faithfulness (Matthew 25:14-30).

Inheritance Taxes

One of the most disastrous developments of the twentieth century is the almost universal acceptance of the moral acceptability and political necessity of very high inheritance taxes on the rich. This is primarily a manifestation of envy.

Voters know that there are very few rich people. They know that when they vote for politicians who in turn legislate confiscatory inheritance taxes, there will not be enough rich heirs whose confiscated inheritance will mean a lot of wealth to voters. There simply aren't enough rich people in the world. Even if all of their inheritance were transferred to the civil government, the amount of wealth would be so small in comparison with the taxes taken from middle-class people, that no one would even notice the money.

So who actually gets the rich man's inheritance? In twentieth-century America, it has been the faceless bureaucrats who run the multi-million-dollar foundations that rich men set up in order to beat the tax collectors. **Socialism inevitably subsidizes bureaucrats.**

In short, the demand for high inheritance taxes has almost nothing to do with the actual amount of taxes collected by the government. It has everything to do with envy: **pulling**

down the successful for the sheer joy of destruction. The inheritance tax is envy-based, and those who vote for it are envious.

The political popularity of extremely high inheritance taxes on the rich has been universal throughout Western civilization over the last seventy years. The justification for high inheritance taxes is that the children of the rich have done nothing to earn the money. Politicians argue that the parent may have been productive in some venture, or lucky in some venture, but this has nothing to do with the merit of the children.

Short-Run Thinking

The economic fallacy of such reasoning is that it is extremely short run in perspective. One of the motivations of a future-oriented businessman is to lay up a large amount of capital to be distributed among his children. The idea is to pass the skills of capital development on to the children, so that they, too, can continue to expand their dominion over whatever they have been entrusted with by the parents. The idea is to expand the dominion of the family by means of a constantly increasing capital base.

Parents understand that if the sons or daughters don't learn the skills of competent administration, the children will eventually lose the money. A wise parent trains his children in the administration of money, service to the community, making a profit in a competitive market, and building up the capital base. If the parent fails to do this, it's obvious that the family's capital base will not survive the second generation, or at least not the third. (The only truly rich family in the United States that has continually expanded its capital for as long as 150 years is the DuPont family.)

The important point is this: the parent has an economic incentive to make good administrators and good businessmen out of his children. If he believes that the State will intervene and take away the money, he has far less incentive to teach his children the skills of business. If anything, he will teach his children the skills of politics.

The classic example of this in United States history is the Kennedy family. Joseph Kennedy, Sr. first trained Joe, Jr. to become President, and when Joe, Jr. died in World War II, Joe, Sr. started training young Jack to do it. Joe, Sr. had made it economically; he intended to keep it politically.

But eventually the legacy departs. The skills are not easily transferred. A black sheep inherits.

An Illegitimate Heir

What the State implicitly is saying when it legislates inheritance taxes is that **the State is in principle the legitimate heir of all families**. The bureaucrats are saying that modern sons and daughters don't have the right to inherit, since they aren't the ones who will be the ultimate supporters of the parents. Why should parents object if the State, as their future benefactor and supporter, should inherit the family fortune?

The modern socialist State promises to take care of everybody, if necessary, womb to tomb. For example, the idea is being abandoned which insists that parents are responsible for the education and support of their children. State bureaucrats assert that they are responsible for the education and welfare of the children.

Why should children object when the State inherits? After all, the true parent is the State. The State educated them, protected them, and now promises to guarantee lifetime employment to them. (Lifetime employment is the law of the land in the United States: the Full Employment Act of 1946. It says that the government has a legal responsibility for creating conditions of full employment, meaning mass inflation, if necessary.)

Since the State claims authority over the children, this tends to make the parents much more short run in their per-

spective. They realize that they are not the ones who have the primary responsibility for the education and training of the children. They implicitly realize that they have transferred responsibility to another agent, the State. The State understands this also, and politicians assert the new doctrine: **inheritance passes to the State.**

The State promises that the parents will retire on Social Security welfare payments, or other State-managed (hal) capital. The children have done nothing to merit the inheritance from the parents, nor are they expected to do anything in the future. **The State first becomes a substitute parent for the children, and it becomes a substitute child for the parent.** The State takes on the responsibility of supporting both the young and the old, so the State naturally demands payment, just as if it were the lawful heir.

There is no escape from the biblical principle: that **the double portion of inheritance belongs to the son who will take full responsibility for the care of the parents.** The modern welfare State is not only demanding a double portion, but in some cases triple, quadruple, or more.

What we are seeing is an **illegitimate substitution of the State into the role of both parent and heir.** The State has become the bastard pretender. The result is the dramatic expansion of State power over the lives of individuals, and a dramatic increase of State interference into the lives of families.

For those who accept the modern theology of the State as Savior, there is no escape from this kind of interference. It's inevitable, given the initial premise, namely, that the State rather than the family is economically responsible for providing the basic welfare services for members of the family. **Where there is God-honoring responsibility, there will inevitably be authority.** Where there is payment, there will inevitably be requirements. Where there is illegitimately asserted responsibility, there will be illegitimate power.

We don't get something for nothing, whether we ask the State to support us in our education to support our children in their education or support us in our old age. To the extent that we bring the State in as a substitute parent, we automatically bring the State in as a substitute child. The State will capture the inheritance of the ungodly. If the godly consent to such practices, they have thereby become ungodly, and the State will eventually get their inheritance, too.

The Biblical Response to the Welfare State

The modern State promises to support its citizens from womb to tomb. It educates the children, cares for the aged, and steadily transfers power to the bureaucrats by taking on new responsibilities. It taxes our labor, it taxes our profits, and it taxes our children's inheritance. It has become a substitute parent for young children, and it has become a substitute child for aged parents. It has taken over the economic responsibilities that each generation is supposed to bear. It therefore insists that it is the lawful heir.

In fact, the modern "Savior State" is a bastard pretender. It is one more example of Satan's efforts to maintain control of the inheritance he extracted from Adam. He still keeps control by luring men into sin. In this case, it is the sin of family irresponsibility. It is also the sin of worshipping the State.

How should Christians attempt to recapture the power

and authority that the State has taken away? The starting point has to be that parents and family members reassert their sovereignty as the source of welfare. **The family is the primary agency of welfare in every civilization.** State bureaucrats may deny this, and they may attempt to transfer to themselves the authority for welfare that the family legitimately holds, but there is no way that the State can completely enforce this transfer of responsibility. Nevertheless, it may go bankrupt trying. It may drive its citizens into bankruptcy, too. The State always extracts wealth from the family in this illegitimate attempt to become the legitimate heir.

"Charity begins at home." This is a famous phrase in American life. It is an accurate phrase. This is **precisely** where charity **must** begin. This doesn't mean that charity is limited only to the home. On the contrary, charity only **begins** at home; it isn't supposed to end there (II Corinthians 8).

Children must learn the basics of charity, and charity must flow from one home to other households. It's the family which is the primary agency of welfare, and in a community where strong families exist, there will be less and less politically perceived necessity for immoral forms of State-administered welfare.

The only way to achieve decentralized power—capturing power away from the modern socialist State—is to make certain that the family once again becomes the primary agency of welfare. The welfare State is illegitimate. The **welfare family** is the biblical basis of most social welfare activity.

We can see the drift of twentieth-century socialist societies. The State intends to confiscate the wealth of the just. The State is acting as the political agent of the envious, the incompetent, and the misled. The State is asserting its sovereignty over the lives of individuals because it asserts the kind of welfare authority which once was strictly limited to the family. Until families recapture control over the wealth of the family, and lay up capital for godly children and grandchildren to inherit, the socialist State will continue to extract the wealth of the population and squander it. The State will continue to attempt to make itself the only lawful inheritor.

Conclusion

Adam forfeited his lawful inheritance when he rebelled against God. Satan appropriated this inheritance as an illegal squatter. He conquered the world in one day by Adam's default.

Jesus' ministry restored the inheritance to His people. He announced a world-wide ministry of conquest, based on the preaching of the gospel of peace. Christians are required to pursue the same program of world dominion which God originally assigned to Adam, and reassigned to Noah (Genesis 9:1-17).

There must be continuity over time. Capital must be allowed to grow through time. The basis of this continuity of economic growth over history is inheritance. Capital is transferred down through the generations. The modern welfare State is a satanic attempt to appropriate the capital of modern man, just as Satan appropriated Adam's inheritance. It is Satan's last-gasp effort to trick Christians out of their lawful inheritance. To the degree that they adopt his evil theory of the State as welfare agent and therefore lawful heir, God's program of world-wide dominion is delayed.

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