

# BIBLICAL ECONOMICS TODAY

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## WHY FIGHT TO LOSE?

by Gary North

**"There is no substitute for victory."**

~~Gen. Douglas MacArthur~~

Most people want to know how to invest their money. What would you think about the following investment? I have found a brand-new company that needs financing. It is run by inexperienced managers who have never been in management positions before. It has a very small budget. It has no government grants of any kind; in fact, the government has already indicted the president of the company for making fraudulent claims. There are no college graduates employed by the company. All the major institutions of higher learning teach a totally different management program and refuse to recognize this firm's techniques as valid.

So far, it doesn't sound too promising. But let me add a few more observations. The firm's product line has been deliberately designed to be out of fashion with the buying public's tastes. It has no advertising budget. The recently recruited sales force is expected to do door-to-door marketing, and they have had no experience in this field. The only experience in direct marketing that the managers had was regional, over the last three years, and the firm suffered tremendous sales resistance in this market. Nevertheless, the firm is determined to go international.

Would you invest in this company? More to the point, ~~would you put everything you own into the company?~~

But I forgot to tell you something. The firm's president is no longer being held by the government. He is now in conference with the chief executive officer, who happens to be his father, and who is the developer of the most brilliant sales and recruiting package the world has ever seen. Not only that, the developer of the program has made sales projection figures that are comprehensive, and which in the past have always proven accurate. He says that the company will eventually dominate the world market.

**Now** would you invest in the company? Maybe, if you believed in the developer and his son.

A little less than 2,000 years ago, a handful of Jews in Palestine were given just this opportunity. They took advantage of it. Of the original twelve "senior managers," one defected to the "rival firm," but died shortly thereafter. He was replaced. Within two months, thousands of recruits from all over the world were brought into the sales force. They returned home with reports on what they had been told. The firm started growing faster than its rivals had believed possible.

The organization is still "in business" today. It's called ~~the church of Jesus Christ~~.

### Historical Conditions in the First Century

When we think about the earthly odds against the early church, we can only marvel at what they accomplished. The Jews were against them. The Roman authorities were against them. The various rival Eastern cults, which were spreading like wildfire throughout the Empire, were against them. The church attracted its converts from the less prestigious groups in society. They had poor educations generally. Most of the early leaders were probably illiterate. How could they have hoped to succeed?

They had God on their side, of course. But God does not place His people into historical vacuums. He had created a unique set of conditions for them to work with.

First, the Roman Empire had established an excellent communications and transportation system. The Roman highways were marvels of engineering. The Roman army kept them generally free of bandits, and the navy kept the Mediterranean free of pirates. Trade flourished.

With trade flourishing, people had to communicate. Two languages were universal: Greek and Latin. Both were advanced languages with literature; they were both written languages, and an historically high percentage of literate people — far higher than four centuries before or ~~later — were available to write and receive messages.~~

Second, people's faith in Greek and Roman religions were fading. There were dozens of Eastern cults coming into Rome. Magic, astrology, and fortune telling were on the rise, and the Roman government could not stamp them out. Religious anarchy was becoming a way of life.

Third, people had lost confidence in representative civil government. Alexander the Great destroyed the Greek democracies before he died in 322 B.C. His successors were declared gods. Augustus Caesar accepted deification by the provinces a few decades before Christ was born. His successors made his divinity official. What elected representative of the Roman people could claim to possess the power of a god?

Augustus downgraded the Roman Senate. Bloodshed soon ruled politics. The emperor Caligula came to the throne in 37 A.D. when his closest companion smothered the emperor Tiberius and then saluted his friend as emperor. Caligula, a madman, declared himself a god. Four years later, two officers of the guard murdered him. The Senate tried to regain power one last time, but failed. The army installed Claudius, a fool. Fourteen years later,

his fourth wife poisoned him. Their son, Nero, the last of the heirs of Augustus, came to power in 54 A.D. His teacher, the philosopher Seneca, had taught him that he was to become the savior of the world. He became a murderous tyrant. He even had his mother and his wife murdered. Who could trust in politics?

Fourth, the economy began to disintegrate. The emperors announced their divinity and the coming salvation of the world on the Roman coins. Steadily, they also debased the coinage. They removed the silver and substituted cheaper copper. Prices skyrocketed. Inflation began to erode people's faith in the economy.

Fifth, government welfare programs began to drain the Roman treasury. Free bread and circuses made high taxation mandatory. People stayed on the dole for so long that the right to receive government handouts became a hereditary right.

Sixth, sexual debauchery became common. The high ideals of the Roman family became little more than a memory. The upper classes no longer served as models for the rest of the citizenry. Pornography spread throughout the culture. Some of the walls of Pompei today are covered with pornographic paintings, as they were when the volcano erupted in 79 A.D. Some of Pompei's statuary is so foul that modern, "liberated" tourists are not even allowed to view it.

Seventh, the population of the upper classes stagnated. They practiced abortion and infanticide. They left their infants in the streets to die.

In short, the whole culture was disintegrating. When people lose faith in their institutions, they are ripe for a takeover by those who have a living faith.

### The Church's Opportunity

The early church took advantage of this unique opportunity. They set up church courts to handle disputes, as Paul had commanded (I Corinthians 6). Their people received justice.

They built strong families. They went out and picked up babies who had been left to die. The authorities were outraged. This was made illegal. So the Christians violated the law. They kept taking home exposed infants.

They took care of their own people. They used the tithe to support the poor and sick among them. They did not go permanently on the dole.

They worked hard. They became the most productive citizens in the Empire. Yet they were persecuted. They refused to honor the "genius" (divinity) of the emperor. This was considered treason by the Roman authorities. Nero used tar-covered Christians as torches at his parties.

For over two centuries the church was persecuted. The persecution was intermittent. One generation would suffer, many would renounce the faith, others would compromise. The church would be "thinned out." Then, strengthened by resistance to persecution, the church would experience growth during periods of relative toleration.

Finally, the emperor Diocletian came to the throne, in 284. Inflation was rampant. He put on price and wage controls. Shortages immediately appeared. He imposed the death penalty for violators. The economy began to collapse. He persecuted the church. In 305, he gave up and abdicated — the first emperor ever to do so.

In 312, Constantine came to the throne. He declared Christianity as a lawful religion. The first Christian emperor of Rome had arrived. The persecutions ended. Christians were brought into the civil government. Constantine rec-

ognized the obvious: there was no other social force in Rome stable enough, honest enough, and productive enough to match the Christian church. The Empire could no longer do without these people. After almost 300 years, **Christ had conquered Caesar**. The power of Rome had crumbled before the kingdom of God. God, through the faithfulness of His people, had vanquished His enemies.

### Christian Self-Government

The church had suffered. It had been reviled, ridiculed, beaten down. But over the years, Christians learned how to deal with adversity. They had learned to deal with reality. There was no Roman state to rely on for justice or protection. They had to rely on God, on themselves, and their church courts. **They became a second government within the Empire**. When the time was ripe, they were ready to exercise leadership.

But what about today? Are Christians ready to exercise leadership in the high places of our world? Where are the Christians? Almost invisible.

Why? Why are people who believe in the God of Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, and Christ almost invisible in today's culture? We live in a culture built by Christians, from the days of Constantine to the days of America's Founding Fathers, almost all of whom were members in good standing in Bible-believing churches. But we have very little say in today's world.

Where can we point to and say, "There's where we're dominant"? In the universities? Hardly; they are all controlled by people who believe that the God of the Bible is irrelevant in the classroom, except to be ridiculed.

In civil government? Where are the Bible-based laws? Where are men able to get elected by campaigning as Bible-believing, Bible-following students of righteousness?

What about entertainment? Debauchery at worst, stupidity at best. The Christians have virtually no influence in this area.

The media? Not on the major networks. Not in the important newspapers. No magazine with national impact acknowledges Christ as king.

In the courts? Where abortion has been legalized? Where a man who shoots the President can be acquitted by reason of insanity? What is really crazy is the law.

We have to face it: **there is hardly a single area where Christians have distinguished themselves as the best in the field**. In Bible translating, yes. In running foreign orphanages, yes. But not in the corridors of power or influence.

### "The Bible Has the Answers!"

That's what we tell people. We go to them with the Word of God and we tell them that they can find the solutions to the problems that are destroying them. But do we believe it? Do we **really** believe it?

What if he is a Senator who faces defeat if he votes for (or against) a particular bill. Does the Bible tell him which way to vote?

What if he is a businessman who is considering borrowing money for a project. Does the Bible give him instruction?

What if he is a judge who is about to sentence a criminal? Does the Bible give him guidelines?

Humanists are convinced that the Bible should not be used as a blueprint for society. As a matter of fact, the vast majority of seminary professors, even in Bible-believing seminaries, agree with the humanists on this point. But if

they are correct, then **what can we use to guide us in our search for right and wrong?** Our own imaginations? What we learn in university classrooms taught by humanists? What we read on the editorial page of the *New York Times*?

### **If not in the Bible, then where?**

This is the question Christians have been avoiding for a century.

### **A "King's X" from God?**

Christians take the message of salvation to lost men. Why? To tell them about the penalties of sin, and God's grace in providing an escape from judgment, through faith in Jesus Christ. Without a knowledge of sin, Paul wrote to the church at Rome, there can be no knowledge of the new life in Christ (Romans 7:9-12).

**Then what do we tell men who are sinning in high places?** The prophets of Israel told kings right to their faces what they had done, and what God was going to do to them if they failed to repent. They were very specific in their charges against the rulers of the day.

But if men can sin in high places, they must be **sinning against something**. They must be sinning against God's law. They must be defying God by disobeying His standards.

In short, **if there are no God-given standards of righteousness in every area of life, then there can be no call to repentance in every area of life**. But if we say this, then we are saying that sinful men can continue to do anything they want in these areas of life. We are saying that God gives to men a huge "king's x" in life.

**There is no zone of neutrality, no "king's x" from God's standards of righteousness, anywhere in the universe**. This is what we have to preach to men if they are to be saved from their sins.

### **God's Comprehensive Judgment**

Sinful man wants to believe that he can escape the judgment of God. He wants to believe that he is free to do whatever he pleases, from morning to night. He does not want to hear the voice of God.

Modern Christian preaching tends to give sinful man what he wants. It tells him that he is "a little" off the mark. He is "not quite" righteous before God. There are "certain areas" of his life that are not being lived in terms of God's requirements. But on the whole, sinful man is really not all that sinful. So he is told.

The prophets of Israel pulled no punches. They went to kings and commoners, priests and rich men, and told them that they were corrupt, from top to bottom. They told them what they had done to violate God's law in every area of life: economics, agriculture, civil government, military strategy, foreign policy, religious worship, and family relations.

The prophets also reminded them of the warnings in Deuteronomy 28. There would be judgments from God: in economics, agriculture, civil government, military strategy, foreign policy, religious worship, and family relations. There is no escape. Sinners must repent.

In other words, **the Old Testament prophets closed the escape hatches**. They would not let the sinners off God's hook in any area of life. They told them that **God's judgment is comprehensive because men's sins are comprehensive**.

But we must never forget what kind of judgment the prophets preached: **judgment unto restoration**. God had them preach judgment unto destruction to the pagan

nations around Israel (except for Jonah, when he preached in Nineveh). What we, too, must preach, is judgment unto restoration.

### **God's Comprehensive Salvation**

Every time the prophets warned the people about God's wrath, they told them why it was coming. They told the people to repent, meaning "to turn around." They told them to turn around from **specific sins** that were going to result in **specific judgments**.

But they also told them something else: **God will bring comprehensive restoration after His comprehensive judgments**. Isaiah said: "I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning; afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness" (Isa. 1:26-27).

He proclaimed to them the coming of "the acceptable year of the Lord" (Isaiah 61:2), in which the people of God "shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations" (Isaiah 61:4).

You have sinned, the prophets told them, and you shall be judged. **But God shall restore you**, even as you rebelled against Him, and even as He judged you: **comprehensively**. From head to toe, you shall be healed. From top to bottom, your entire culture shall be restored.

Restored to what condition? As it was in the beginning. What beginning? As it was when God delivered His law to Moses at Sinai, after the great deliverance of Israel out of Egypt. In short, Israel was to be **restored in terms of God's comprehensive law**, which they had rebelled against comprehensively.

Do modern Christians really believe this? Not many seem to. They do not confront the whole society with the call of repentance. They do not seem to recognize that our whole civilization is in rebellion against God, from top to bottom. They preach as though they think that the definition of sinning can be limited to a few things, such as adultery, or alcoholism, or heroin addiction, or nudity in the movies, or bad language on prime-time television, or prohibiting prayers in the public schools.

**When a whole civilization is in rebellion, the whole culture is involved, every aspect of that culture**. But you would not guess this from listening to today's sermons, even in supposedly conservative churches.

### **The Dominion Assignment**

God said to Adam and Eve: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (Gen. 1:28).

God said to Noah and his sons: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Gen. 9:1).

God said to Abraham: "And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly" (Gen. 17:2).

God said to Moses and the people of Israel: "The Lord shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the Lord swore unto thy fathers to give to thee. The Lord shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. And the Lord

shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath: if that thou hearken unto commandments of the Lord thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them" (Deut. 28:11-13).

God said through the resurrected Christ: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:18-20).

God said through the Apostle Paul: "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet" (1 Corinthians 15:24-25).

**God said . . . but modern Christians prefer not to listen.** They do not want to hear about their **comprehensive responsibility** to master the word of God, and to apply His standards in every area of life, bringing the whole world under the reign of Jesus Christ. They prefer to minimize their responsibility, calling men **out of the world**, rather than calling them to **rule over the world under the authority of Jesus Christ**.

### **Satan's Collapsing Society**

We think that we are too weak, too unorganized, to achieve victory in social, political, and economic affairs. But look around us. What does the enemy have?

He has inflation one year and recession the next. In some years he has both at once. He has a culture filled with people who have lost faith in everything: God, law, the political system, the sanctity of marriage, and even physical survival.

Men without faith have difficulty in building anything permanent. People today have begun to lose faith in the future. Two generations ago, Americans were optimistic about the future. Today, they are glumly reconciled to seeing the loss of American power, American honor, and the American dollar. **Men without hope are ripe for defeat by men who have hope.**

People are aborting their children, perhaps the ultimate rejection of the future. Their public, tax-supported schools are producing illiterate graduates by the millions every year.

Welfare costs are exploding. The budgets of every nation are running huge deficits. No one knows where the money (with purchasing power) will come from to pay off Social Security obligations.

Our national defense system has fallen behind our enemy's. Our law enforcement organizations are virtually admitting defeat in the fight against crime.

In short, the society of Satan once again resembles the Roman Empire. It always must. We must not forget what happened to the Roman Empire. **Rome fell to Jesus Christ.**

### **A Biblical World and Life View**

The Bible speaks to every area of life. God holds men responsible for sinning in every area of life. God's law provides standards of righteousness in every area of life. The goal, then, is to learn what God requires of us, as individuals and as a society, and then humbly to begin to apply what we have learned.

We know that men cannot sin from morning to night and escape God's judgment. They must be called back to righteousness. In every area of life, they must first repent, and then return to their jobs as redeemed men, **to rebuild in terms of God's standards**. They must repair the damage their sinfulness caused. **They must make restitution.**

In every area of life, we must reconstruct: in education, in medicine, in agriculture, in economics, in our occupations, in politics, in law enforcement, in family relationships, in church life, in the arts and sciences . . . **in everything.**

God has told us what we must accomplish, as individuals and as a nation, in order to fulfill our dominion assignment. There is no escape from this assignment, from Adam's day to the present. There can be personal success or failure in carrying it out, but no escape. God holds us responsible, as individuals and as a society. We have our marching orders from a God who has promised victory to His people, in time and on earth. **Victory can be achieved only in terms of God's righteousness, God's sacrifice at Calvary, and God's standards of righteousness for every realm of life.**

Satan cannot win. Why not? Because he has denied God's sovereignty and disobeyed God's law. But Moses was told explicitly, God's blessings come only from obedience. **Satan will not win because he has abandoned God's tool of dominion, biblical law.**

It is time for Christians to stop giving Satan credit for more than he is worth. Christians must stop worrying about Satan's power, and start working to undermine his kingdom. Contrary to a best-selling paperback book of the 1970's, Satan is not alive and well on planet earth — alive, yes, but not well. His troops are no better than their commander's strategy, and that strategy is flawed. They have been winning only because of the rival army's field-grade officers' unwillingness to take their Commander's strategy seriously. When they finally begin to follow orders — the law of God — meaning that they begin to "do it by the Book," Satan's troops will be driven from the field.