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Heart of Stone and Heart of Flesh

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Heart of Stone and Heart of Flesh

Abstract

"Scripture makes it clear that stewardship is much more than a perspective on wealth or money."

Posting about Scriptural insights on economics from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/heart-of-stone-and-heart-of-flesh/>

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Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Heart of Stone and Heart of Flesh

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John Visser

It seems like there is more economic uncertainty than almost ever before. We are emerging from what some would argue was the most significant global recession since The Great Depression. Yet, the stock market is still on pins and needles, the U.S. Government continues to run deficits to stimulate the economy, and the Federal Reserve seems afraid to allow interest rates to return to historically normal levels. What should Christians who believe their attitudes and behaviors should be normed by stewardship do in such an environment?

The answer to this could be addressed at several levels, since God calls us to be good stewards, not only individually, but in our households, businesses, volunteer work, and government service. Thankfully, Scripture provides the wisdom needed for kingdom work to continue with limited disruption when economies falter. Since we are to give of our first fruits, not of our leftovers, our tithing should continue even if our hours or wages get cut back. If a recession exacerbates inequality, those who have been given much have been told that much is also expected of them. And, if incomes fall across the board (which hasn't happened much in recent recessions), we can still share our time or property with each other, since the Bible makes it clear that we should be wise enough, like Joseph, to store up during good times so that we can weather the bad times. Christians need not make any excuse for storing up for these purposes, since the Bible illustrates often that wealth used in this way is God-honoring. And, as long as it is being accumulated because of diligence, faithfulness, or obedience, and is not allowed to become "a stumbling block," object of idolatry, or instrument for perpetuating injustice, it will be a blessing to the wealthy and their beneficiaries. This is true not only for individuals, but also for businesses and governments. If this storing up is continued over long periods of time, future generations will find it easier to cope with difficult times.

This view of wealth comes from a recognition that everything belongs to God, and, as his stewards, we are called to "honor the Lord with our wealth" and to always be ready to give an account of our stewardship. Stewardship is part of true worship. And Biblically speaking, receiving and giving are like two sides of a coin. We give because we have received, and God wants us to receive even more – at least more of what is truly good for us – as we faithfully give. He knows that if we have been stingy, unfaithful, or poor stewards with past gifts, it is unlikely that receiving more will either be good for us or particularly useful for advancing his kingdom.

Thankfully, the Bible provides great insight into what is necessary for financial and human flourishing, including how we can accumulate the resources needed to weather economic downturns. For example, Scripture makes it clear that stewardship is much more than a perspective on wealth or money. Even the narrower subject of personal financial stewardship is much broader than budgeting or tithing: it encompasses marital relationships, educational choices, consumption habits, planning, patience, sexual purity, marital commitment, parent-child interaction, and literally hundreds of other personal life choices. Attitudes like humility and respect or a willingness to learn or admit mistakes build up both organizations and the economy. Truth-telling increases stewardship by enhancing trust, motivation, and efficiencies in communication and business. Faith makes it easier for us to accumulate resources by taking risks when others are fearful and investing for the future when potential returns are the highest. Love and genuine concern for others spurs us to not only nurture our children, but to also recognize the gifts of others and help them succeed – regardless of how well we know them or their gender, ethnicity, race, or social class.

To summarize, we are reminded that stewardship involves not only our spending, saving, and investing, but also our time, our bodies, our care for the things we possess or the natural world, our building and protection of relationships, our capacity building in organizations, and even political reform.

Scripture also reminds us that stewardship is best accomplished in community. Not only can we do things more efficiently and effectively when we work together, we are told that when the people of the world see this kind of love and unity in the Christian community they will not only praise God, but will also be drawn to Christ. And, since the Christian community transcends geographic and political boundaries, other options open up during tough times. Many have migrated from places where jobs are scarce to places where jobs are more plentiful, knowing that brothers and sisters in Christ are everywhere, willing to help those who are both willing to work and in need of hospitality.

The Bible also reveals that God sends “both poverty and wealth,” and that both can not only be a blessing, but can be used to shape us into the people he wants us to be. And, even though God graciously overlooks our sins in Christ, we continue to live in a world where blessings are mysteriously connected with obedience and curses with disobedience. This can and should allow us to rejoice, whether our wealth is going up or down, and should also cause us to reflect on why this might be happening. In Ezekiel 36, God tells us that when Israel’s “heart of stone” is replaced with a “heart of flesh,” trees will produce fruit, fields will be plowed and sown, people and animals will multiply, and towns will be inhabited. We, too, should look for the connections between our hearts of stone and our economic problems – at least when hearts of stone are turned to hearts of flesh – as both opportunities for stewardship and cause for rejoicing.