

Biblical *Oikonomia* and Economic *Shalom*

I. Biblical *Oikonomia*: Whole-Life Discipleship, Stewardship and Calling

We tend to separate the worlds of discipleship and economic work. However, in the Bible the same word – *oikonomia* – means both “stewardship” and “economics.” As we explain in our manifesto “Whatever You Do,” discipleship requires an integration of our faith and our economic work. This involves:

1. A personal identity based on whole-life discipleship and stewardship

- a. Every individual is made to be, in all of life, God’s steward over his creation household
- b. Our sin disrupts stewardship internally (wrong desires) and externally (scarcity & suffering)
- c. Redemption involves living into a redeemed stewardship; discipleship is all life, not just religious works
- d. Stewardship will continue to define our eternal role; our stewardship now, amid scarcity and sinfulness, is preparation for an even more glorious stewardship without such limitations

2. A personal calling to cultivate the creation order through our work

- a. God accomplishes his purposes (individually and socially) by gifting us with abilities to cultivate creation and calling us to use them in service to others; this is what all legitimate work does
- b. Because of the fall, work takes place amid scarcity and sinfulness, and is often difficult, painful, and futile; but work itself, and the call to stewardship and service, is a created blessing, not a curse
- c. Redemption makes our work spiritually fruitful; work is stewardship, so it is central to discipleship
- d. Our work here in the present world is eternally fruitful (although we may disagree about how)

II. Economic *Shalom*: The Church and the World, Theology and Economics

Christian religious professionals and Christian economic professionals have great difficulty understanding and trusting one another. This undermines the church’s effectiveness in serving the poor, opposing materialism, and shining the light of the gospel into human civilization. As we explain in our vision document “Economic *Shalom*,” healing this breach requires respectful dialogue between theology and economics. This involves:

1. Integrating spiritual and material knowledge in *both* theology *and* economics

- a. Economics is not primarily about money but about serving human needs; businesses exist not to make profits (though they must do that to sustain themselves) but to serve customers; this is why God designed us so economic work takes up most of life and is central to our sense of meaning and purpose
- b. Theology is not merely cognitive and is not only concerned with eternal being, but is inescapably bound up in the practical realities of action, history and human civilization; thus a distinctively theological perspective is needed on all civilizational activities, including economics
- c. Economics as a discipline was originally developed by theologians as a branch of moral philosophy; the influence of Christianity on economic work was the primary cause of the unprecedented explosion of economic flourishing in the last several centuries, because it inculcated a stewardship mindset
- d. The separation of theology and economics facilitates dualism in the church and dysfunction in the economy; re-integrating faith and economic work is needed for the sake of both

2. Applying integrated knowledge from both disciplines in carrying out the mission of God

- a. The church, not the market or the state, must take the lead in caring for the poor; but it must overcome materialistic and dualistic assumptions about how to do so effectively
- b. An effective response to materialism must affirm the goodness of material activities and teach people to take satisfaction in doing these activities as stewards, answering God’s call and serving human needs
- c. Contested terms mean different things to different people; theological discourse should avoid using phrases strongly associated with political agendas (“free markets,” “social justice”)
- d. To prevent theology from becoming subordinate to politics, we must not avoid thinking about politics, but think about it all the more carefully; most importantly, economic *shalom* requires the rule of law