

Wealth Transfer –Sample

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Dr. Stephen R. Crosby

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“Chasm” is a good definition of the gap between historical and contemporary attitudes toward money in the Church. Medieval monks sanctified poverty and today’s prosperity preachers beatify riches. Both claim(ed) the Scriptures as their authority and realization of Christ’s kingdom as their goal. Modern prosperity preachers don’t deny the gap. They view themselves as divinely sanctioned remediators to historically deficient thought and practices regarding wealth. Perhaps . . . perhaps not.

The issue of money and prosperity doesn’t readily yield itself to tidy theological packaging. On the one hand the Scriptures clearly speak of the futility and danger of riches.ⁱ On the other hand they declare that prosperity is proof of the blessing of God.ⁱⁱ Yet the same Scriptures say that material prosperity doesn’t necessarily indicate the endorsement and blessing of the Lord, as even the wicked prosper.ⁱⁱⁱ So, merely stacking up favorite proof texts on this topic is not very helpful. A Franciscan monk and a seed-faith televangelist can both find their justifying verses and build an interpretive filter with them, ignoring the other’s legitimacies.

Someone once coined the phrase: the tyranny of the or.^{iv} That is, when facing a problem or an issue, the only satisfying outcome—the “right” way, or the “right” point of view, must be either this or that. Our processing of Scripture can succumb to the tyranny of the or. It doesn’t matter if we put up our doctrinal tent on the north, south, east, or west side of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the garden. *It’s the wrong tree.*

Christ’s kingdom transcends polar opposites as well as the “blended middle.” Neither Christ in His Person, nor the Scriptures (which reveal and reflect His Person) are balanced in the sense of a blended middle. For example, His justice is as unyielding as His mercy. He’s not *justimerciful* or *mercijustifil*: the blended middle. He’s wholly righteous and just, and wholly love and mercy. He’s 100% lion and 100% lamb. He’s not a *lamion* or *liolamb*. He’s neither a tamed lion nor an amped up lamb!

One of the unintended negative consequences of the Reformation was the introduction of a rationalistic tendency into the Protestant Church that abides to this day. The Reformers were formally trained in the universities of their time in what were the liberal art disciplines (humanities) of languages, philosophy, rhetoric, and so forth. They presented the Gospel in the intellectual and cultural climate of their day with the tools and grace they had. They responded (reacted?) to the opposite extreme of rationalism: the Biblically unbounded, unrestrained, and superstitious mysticism of the theology and practices of the Roman Church.

We can confuse commitment to faithfulness to the Text with a rationalism that is itself, unfaithful to the Text. Because the Scriptures deal with absolutes, we can mistakenly believe that we can have absolute accuracy of understanding, if our approach is just disciplined enough. We sometimes forget that the water Ezekiel could not pass through (water that could lift him up and carry him away – Eze. 47) is “kingdom normal.” If our God is not bigger than our intellect, He’s not a very big God.

When it comes to money, finding kingdom normal can be a challenge. Christians have lived with this theological and practical tension regarding money for the entire existence of the Church. As proverbially present as wheat and tares, so is the wisdom and folly of the Church Universal regarding money. As indisputable as Christian charity has been through the centuries (individual and corporate), our corruptions with money are regrettably equally pronounced. The historical record is inarguably mixed, and sadly contemporary. For every act of unfathomable Christian generosity (usually done in private without fanfare), gross financial abuse at the hands of highly visible individuals thrusts itself into our culture’s consciousness through the sheer scale of its absurdity and wickedness—to the discredit of the name of the Lord and our shame.

In my segment of the Church there’s been much emphasis in recent years regarding the alleged transfer of wealth from the wicked to the righteous based primarily on Proverbs 13:22. It’s a common theme on Christian television and in the bookstores. Proponents use a misapplication of Ecclesiastes 10:19 (money answers to all things) as a justifying proof text^v to exhort Christians to repent for their defective attitudes toward money, and pursue riches as a means to accomplish the purposes of the Lord in the earth.

It’s alleged that since unbelievers don’t know how to use money properly, and since we’re promised a transfer of wealth, it’s incumbent upon Christians to obtain as much money as possible to buy the real estate, buy the businesses, become the city councilmen, make the laws, etc. For example:

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“The quickest way to transform a city is to buy it.”^{vi}”

Somehow, I just can't picture Jesus sitting under a fig tree in Galilee, scratching His head saying: "Gee, I wish I had thought of that."

The privilege of living in a representative republic allows us the ballot box to legitimately influence government and transform society institutionally. The manifestation of the life of Christ transforms hearts individually. In the transfer of wealth teaching, money becomes the vehicle of societal transformation. Since we supposedly behave ethically and morally according to Biblical law, and since we now control the money, we are qualified to exert authoritative government on the institutes of society. Unbelievers will have to do things "our way" in righteousness. Our righteous behavior and our money thus transform society.

To me, this is just a religious version of economic imperialism: trying to enforce kingdom values on a society through the power of money. It makes no difference if coercion is being done with a bullet, a Koran, or a dollar bill. It's still coercion, and as such, alien to the Gospel of our Lord.

I'm all for influencing every fabric of mortal existence through the manifestation of the life of Christ, in and through us, loving others and laying down our life for others. I'm all for the effect of salt, light, and heaven, in every institution on planet earth. Everywhere my feet tread is a field of ministry. That includes the marketplace and all other secular arenas. The rarified atmosphere of local church experience is not the only place where spiritual ministry takes place. Frankly, in a post-Christian society, it's unlikely that the kingdom will unfold significantly within that confine. Jesus' miracles, for the most part, did not occur during a "service." They occurred as He engaged individuals in the daily affairs of life in the society where they were.

I'm neither anti-wealth nor anti-marketplace ministry per se. However, I'm very concerned about methods, tone, and spirit emerging in much wealth transfer teaching. It's so subtle and psychologically appealing to talk of "transforming cultural institutions," "redeeming the pillars of culture," and so forth.^{vii} There's a detached abstractness about it all that's so counter to the Gospel. We can ascribe to ourselves a sense of false spiritual significance as we join a great cause. Belonging to a "super-entity" that's working to transform culture is much easier than being practically inconvenienced to actually care for, touch, and lay down my life for the family that lives next door that annoy me. I'm too busy "fulfilling my destiny and my calling, and my ministry," doing the great work of changing society, to actually care for my neighbor. (If you need conviction read the Good Samaritan parable. It applies.)

The tone of mastery and ascendancy in much wealth transfer and market place teaching also distresses me. It seems to be all about our ascension to greatness, power, might, dominance, and authority, so contrary to our Lord's Gospel, His Cross, and His Spirit. It's as if the three areas that the Lord overcame in His temptation: natural sustenance (in our case, money); ascension (the pinnacle of the temple); and the greatness of this world's systems, have become, for some, the very things we supposedly need to do successful ministry!

ⁱ Proverbs 11:4, 11:28, 13:7, 23:5, 27:24; Psalm 49, Psalm 62:10 and others.

ⁱⁱ Psalms 19:14, 112:2-3; Proverbs 22:4, and others.

ⁱⁱⁱ Psalm 73:12

^{iv} James Collins and Jerry Porras. *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*. New York: Harper Business. 1994.

^v See John Louis Muratori. *Rich Church, Poor Church. Unlock The Secrets of Creating Wealth and Harness the Power of Money to Influence Everything*. Chester: gateKeeper Publishing, 2007, 65. The book of Ecclesiastes is written from an earthly perspective of despair. The author is recounting how things are on earth, not how they should be by divine prescription. It's fundamental error to take a passage of Scripture describing a condition on earth and making it a divine prescription for kingdom methodologies. Indeed, without considering God, the corrupt systems of this world do run on money. That is not a positive to thing to be normalized and emulated!

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Some speak of transforming the 7 mountains of culture: Arts and Entertainment, Business, Education, Family, Government, Media, and Religion.