

GRACE ECONOMICS (2)  
THE KINGDOM ECONOMY 7



T. M. Moore

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

A REVISION STUDY

Grace Economics (2)  
The Kingdom Economy Part 7  
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Susie Moore, Editor and Finisher

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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## Welcome to *Grace Economics (2)*

This is the second of two parts on the topic of *Grace Economics*, in which we are looking into the holy and righteous and good Law of God to discern some principles for commerce within the Kingdom economy of God. We want to see that *grace* economics is a matter of *justice* in all aspects of economic life, from the individual member of a society to the larger communities of which he or she is a member.

We began this part of our 10-part study of *The Kingdom Economy* by looking at the economy of grace as an alternative to the economy of getting and spending. In these last days, God is calling us to His Kingdom and glory, that we might serve Him with all our time, in all the work we've been given to do, and in all our cultural and commercial activity.

We discussed such everyday topics as caring for the poor, the right use of property, debt, and being honest with one another in all our transactions. We also identified some basic principles of practice related to how we as individuals can learn from God's Law to overcome the allure of *greed* and have *grace* for the Kingdom economy in every situation.

In *Grace Economics (2)*, which is Part 7 in our series, we will look more closely at the role of individuals, communities, and governments in commercial and economic life. We want to discern the *principles* of justice for each level of society, which can help ensure that grace economics will obtain. We will wrap up this section of our larger study by returning to look at two particular questions of property rights – inheritances and taxation – and then consider how we must prepare for the future unfolding of the Kingdom economy of God.

These studies are designed for individual or group use. While you may derive much benefit from studying on your own, that benefit can be greatly enhanced by joining with a friend or a group to read, discuss, share, challenge, and pray for one another.

If you're in a group, make sure you prepare for each study by reading through the lesson in advance and answering the questions in writing. Take turns leading your group. Let every member share in the privilege and responsibility of facilitating discussions. Group leaders should not feel like they have to "have all the answers." Their task is simply to lead the group through the readings and questions, and to help everyone participate.

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T. M. Moore  
Principal

## 1 Individual Responsibility

*“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.”* Leviticus 19.18

*Fair, just, good*

*Grace economics* identifies an economy based not on greed and self-interest, but on principles of justice and love, derived from careful study and wise application of principles revealed in the Law and Word of God.

In an economy based on getting and spending, people look to government to ensure fair and just opportunities to achieve material wealth. Increasingly, however, this is coming to mean fair and just distribution of wealth so that everyone can have a slice of the pie, at the expense of those who made the pie.

Politicians delight to play this game, for it allows them to explore endless possibilities for purchasing the support of various constituencies through the manipulation of public policy. In the American economy, the State presumes to be the arbiter of all things good and fair and just. It alone possesses the power to enforce its views and to shuffle and distribute resources according to its preferences and policies, which policies are fixed only by the whims and wishes of whichever political party happens to be in power.

Government thus feels free to compel those who *have* means to *yield* those means to the State for its purposes in spreading the wealth around. In so doing, the State presumes to define the terms of goodness, fairness, and justice, and encroaches on individual responsibility by taking away the freedom one has to steward his personal property as he sees fit and, especially, as accountable to God alone.

Government’s attempt to play God thus results in a loss of freedom and the cancellation of individual responsibility for the use of resources. And in the Kingdom economy of God, grace begins with individual responsibility under God and His Law.

*Responsibility in the Kingdom economy*

In the Kingdom economy, people are encouraged to seek the wisdom of God and to use their resources in a manner consistent with His instructions and commandments. Individual responsibility before God is a bedrock principle of the Kingdom economy. We are stewards of property entrusted to us by God, as we have seen. We stand or fall before Him according to the economics of justice outlined in His Law.

Those who will not tithe, for example, or who refuse to help the poor in their community must answer to God for their disobedience and hardness of heart. But should they be subjected to government policies that seize their wealth in order to do what is “right”, or to some church’s attempt to manipulate their giving?

During the early days of this nation, some states levied taxes to support churches. This should have been considered unjust, since these laws forced even non-believers to support preachers of the Gospel.

Programs of income redistribution that exceed the bounds of *distributive* justice as defined by God’s Law are, in Kingdom terms, *unjust*, and will only lead to more injustice in the future.

Christians who use their property without due concern for love of God and neighbor, may come under the chastening hand of God, Who disciplines His children in order to lead them in the path of righteousness (Heb. 12.3-11).

Those beyond the pale of faith are still accountable to God for the use they make of His good gifts – time, strength, property, and treasure. We may deplore their selfishness and lack of concern for the needy, but trying to force neighbor love by the unjust seizure of property only creates anger, resentment, and corruption.

*An example*

In other times, the example of the righteous, and the peer pressure they were able to bring to bear in society, exerted strong influence in encouraging people to exercise individual responsibility in the way of love toward their neighbors, according to the requirements of God's Law, even when people many not have been particularly eager to do so. This is one of the promises where the Kingdom economy obtains (cf. Ps. 81.15).

The movement to free slaves and to reform public manners in early 19<sup>th</sup>-century England, led by William Wilberforce, demonstrates how example and instruction on the part of the believing community can move a society to enact just public policies. In this effort, individual responsibility for loving one's neighbor was restored and embodied first *within particular communities*. From that platform, others were called to join in the effort. Over time, as public opinion was influenced toward Biblical principles, unjust public policies gave way to just policies.

Free economic practice depends on individual responsibility, the right to enter into commerce without coercion. In grace economics, individual responsibility is exercised unto the Lord first of all, and *persuasion*, not *political maneuvering*, is the key to keeping greed in check and bringing more justice to commerce and society. And such persuasion begins in the words and deeds of those who have embraced the Kingdom economy as their own.

*For reflection or discussion*

1. Are we our brothers' keepers? Does fulfilling this role work better in grace economics or greed economics? Explain.
2. How does the concept of *responsibility* in commerce and economics fit in with the Christian calling to follow Jesus?
3. How do personal example and social pressure work to increase the practice of individual responsibility?

*Next steps – Preparation: What is the Gospel of the Kingdom? How should this Gospel move us to help people realize the Good News that is in Jesus Christ? How much of life does this Good News affect? Talk with some Christian friends about these questions.*

## 2 Relationships

*“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.”* Leviticus 19.18

*To compete or to serve?*

In an economy based on getting and spending, people compete with one another for resources, opportunities, and advantages. In *grace economics*, an economy based on principles of divine justice, people work together to bring the righteousness, peace, and joy of God’s Kingdom into the experience of all members of the community. Gaining advantage is replaced by seeking opportunities to serve; self-interest is replaced by self-denial; mutual edification takes the place of self-aggrandizement; and grace overrides greed in carrying out one’s individual responsibility.

America has been described as a nation of narcissists, a people whose primary concern is, in the memorable phrase of Robert Ringer, “looking out for number one.” This is not by accident, but by design. Americans are taught to seek a competitive edge on others and to learn the skills and protocols that will allow them to realize their fullest material potential. This is in part a consequence of the Darwinian worldview which defines the warp and woof of relationships in our society. But it is also the natural outworking of our commitment to material prosperity, to an economics of greed.

From early on, children are taught to seek their own interests and to do what they can in order to gain advantages over their peers. Education – in home and school – reinforces the convictions that children should be happy and that material prosperity is the way to happiness. Other people, while they may be enjoyed as friends or intimates, should not be allowed to disrupt the quest for personal happiness and material wealth.

Abortion is the classic example of how self-interest, which always includes material considerations, works to the disadvantage of the weak.

*Relationships in an economy of justice*

In a grace economy, husbands and wives work to fulfill their marriage vows. Divorce should be rare in such an economy, caring for the poor a matter of continuous concern, and abortion all but non-existent. In the worldview represented by God’s Law, fathers and mothers take responsibility for raising their children in such a way as to inculcate neighbor-love above mere self-interest. The Ten Commandments are taught as a way to discipline the hearts and minds of children so that loving their neighbors becomes the default manner of living. Honesty, civility, industry, creativity, and concern for community tend to characterize people who love the Lord their God with all their heart and their neighbors as themselves.

In short, relationships in the Kingdom economy of God are modeled on the mutual love, giving, and enjoyment the member of the Trinity share with One Another, looking to Jesus, standing on His Word, and relying on the power of God’s Spirit.

We may wonder where such a grace economics can be found in practice today. Among some Christians, grace is experienced during their time at church, but greed and self-interest tend to drive almost every other aspect of their lives.

A form of the Kingdom economy obtained in colonial New England, however, under the leadership of Puritan pastors and governors, as Helena M. Wall explained in her book, *Fierce Communion*. Ms. Wall is no

friend of the Puritans; nevertheless, she shows the many ways that neighbors took responsibility for one another, and neighbor-love, according to God's Law, set the tone for New England social life.

In such an economy neighbors look out for one another, and fairness and honesty prevail in the marketplace. Where justice takes precedence over material wealth, generosity, charity, compassion, and altruism are more likely to flourish. The fact that, year after year, the members of the Christian community prove to be the most generous in giving their time, strength, and wealth for the relief of the needy is typical of what we might expect to see as characterizing relationships of every sort in an economy of justice.

*The example of the first Christians*

Where people value justice above wealth and grace above greed – a community based on principles derived from God's Law – every type of relationship will be transformed. In the Book of Acts Christians demonstrated the power of such an economy in astonishing ways, and they were able, by so doing, to convince even some of their most ardent opponents to believe the Gospel of the Kingdom (cf. Acts 6.1-7; cf. Ps. 66.3).

The place to begin working for such an economy is in the Christian home and church. The grace we learn here, and that we share with one another, can carry over into all other aspects of our lives, as believers model the relational power of an economy of justice and love. When we are more consistent and conspicuous as a community of grace, the world will marvel at our oneness, and flock to discover the secret to our peace, joy, and hope (Deut. 4.5-8; Mic. 5.1-8; 1 Pet. 3.15). Then we may be able to recommend public policies that allow the benefits of such an economy to redound to all members of the community.

*For reflection or discussion*

1. Do you think it's fair to describe America as a nation of narcissists? Why or why not?
2. What are some of the differences between relationships based on economic advantage and relationships based on neighbor-love?
3. Meditate on Acts 6.1-7. Discuss the impact of the relationships of these first Christians on the community around them?

*Next steps – Demonstration: What opportunities does your church have to demonstrate the grace of God to the needy in your community? Talk with a church leader about this question.*

### 3 Community

*“You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the LORD your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment.” Deuteronomy 16:18*

#### *Effective government*

In the Kingdom economy, following the grace economics outlined in God’s Law, effective government begins at the local level, with effective self-government and loving and orderly homes and churches.

The Law of God does not envision a large national government which has as its primary purpose regulating the affairs of the nation to maximize material prosperity for all. Israel was granted permission to appoint a king, it is true; however, his role was primarily to consist in marshaling the nation to defend its borders and in guiding the people in the path of justice and neighbor-love (Deut. 17). In the economy outlined in God’s Law, local government, in the form of elected judges and officials, held a much more prominent role in ensuring that justice prevailed in all the towns and villages of Israel.

In the Kingdom economy, such modeling of true community life begins in the local church, and in true churches throughout a community. By looking to the Law of God, local churches can rediscover the promise and power of true community, and begin to model and affect the shape of the larger community in which they exist.

In ancient Israel, local officials – called *elders* or *judges* – were selected from among the people on the basis of their godly character and familiarity with the norms of grace and justice set forth in God’s Law. Their calling was to maintain order and peace within their communities by encouraging righteous obedience to God’s Law in all its parts.

These judges carried out their work by meeting in the gates of the city, where, symbolically, their deliberations and actions could protect the city against injustice, and where, as well, people could learn to live according to God’s Law by observing their work. As we see in Ruth 4, officials could be assembled at the wish of a member of a community, in order to render a judgment in some matter or dispute. Undoubtedly, however, they also met with some regularity, perhaps to review the overall state of the divine economy in their community, and also to discuss matters related to understanding the Law of God.

Justice in Israel was a gem of five facets: obligatory, preventive, restorative, retributive, and distributive. Each of these facets is carefully illustrated in the Law of God, and it was the duty of local government to ensure that neighbors understood the requirements of justice and practiced them consistently in their relationships and dealings with one another. Thus the community as a whole would stand out as an island of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit, much as the community of Bethlehem did during the chaotic time of the judges (cf. Ruth).

#### *Rulers as “shepherds”*

The local rulers of Israel were to regard themselves as “shepherds” of the people, who were the flocks of God. As such, these elders and judges were “under-shepherds” of God, the divine Shepherd. Their duty was to care for the wellbeing of each member of the community, to do whatever they could to ensure that the benefits of justice flowed to all.

The idea that local officials were shepherds under the divine Shepherd is doubtless the source of Paul’s understanding that all civil governments are servants of God for good (Rom. 13.1-5). It should not surprise

us that, in the economics of getting and spending that dominates our society, rulers are more likely to be regarded as wolves in sheep's clothing than shepherds of their constituents.

*Local government vs. central government*

Jesus declared the first criterion of a shepherd to be knowing and loving the people entrusted to his care (Jn. 10.1-4, 14, 15). Leaders of local Kingdom communities – families, churches, Christian ministries of all kinds – must understand the needs of their constituents better than local elected officials or representatives in a far-off national capital.

This model of local rule provided social, moral, and economic vitality during the early days of the American experience, when the center of every community was the home, the church (which doubled as town meeting hall), and the town green. Then, city and county governments were much more important than at present. Churches played a much larger role in all matters of public and cultural life. Marriages were stable, and children learned the important lessons of life from their parents. People flourished within their communities, running small farms, conducting business out of their homes, serving in local militias, educating children according to their bent and ability, caring for the poor and needy, and participating in government and politics.

Over the past 200 years government in America has become increasingly centralized, as Americans have come to believe that a strong central government is the best way to ensure maximum material prosperity for all. The result is that, while wealth has increased in America, justice and vibrant community life – in the form of neighbor-love – have suffered considerably.

Just government begins in just self-government, learned from God's Law, taught in Christian homes and churches, practiced at the local level, and encoded, as far as possible, in the public policies of the land. Such a Kingdom economy can only be promoted from within communities determined to live within the grace of God's Law and all His Word.

*For reflection or discussion*

1. How do local governments serve the needs of people today?
2. Do you think public officials today consider themselves as shepherds? Why or why not? Would it make a difference if they felt this? What about local church leaders?
3. How has the growth of central government affected the work of local governments in America? Is this a good thing? Explain.

*Next steps – Preparation: Do you think most Americans consider local politics to be as important as national politics? What does this say about our view of government? Do you think churches should work harder to teach their members how to live in community? Talk with some Christian friends about these questions.*

## 4 National Government

*“When you come to the land which the Lord your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,’ you shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother.”*  
Deuteronomy 17.14, 15

### *The role of the king*

There is certainly a role for national government in the Kingdom economy outlined in God’s Law. But only as long as that government acknowledges and pursues a *grace* agenda as its operating motif.

A national government is important for such areas as national defense, maintaining a sound currency, facilitating transportation and commerce, and serving as a final bar of appeal as required in questions of justice. God allowed Israel to select a king because He understood the important role of strong national leadership in creating and sustaining an economy of grace.

The primary roles of Israel’s king were two: First, he was to provide leadership for the nation in just wars against enemies, when these threatened the safety and security of the nation. Second, the king was to provide leadership by example in following the teachings of God’s Law. Each Israelite king was responsible to write out a copy of God’s Law in his own hand, to have his copy approved by the priests, and to read and meditate in God’s Law daily, that he might understand and practice the tenets of justice required by the economy of God’s Law.

### *Purpose of our national government*

The objective of America’s national government, as expressed in the preamble to our Constitution, is “to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity...”

Here we note but scant mention of material wealth. The objectives outlined in the United States Constitution are appropriate to the *limited* role of national government which the Founders envisioned, and much more in line with an *economics of justice and freedom* than an economics of material prosperity. The Constitution was drafted not to spread the wealth around, but to maintain a national framework of justice and opportunity against all threats, domestic and international, a framework where each person exercised responsible choices, cared for his neighbor, contributed to his community, and practiced the rights and privileges with which he had been endowed by his Creator.

### *Effects of increased national government*

Would we say that our national government today has brought us to “a more perfect Union”? Given the fact that our society is riven along so many lines – economic, political, racial, and generational – it’s clear that self-interest and economic advantage are more the norm and aspiration of the American people than justice and neighbor love. The stronger our central government grows, and the more it refuses to look to the wisdom of God’s Law, the more the national fabric unravels.

The nation is divided racially, economically, politically, and generationally against itself in a struggle for material advantage. Would we say that this government is primarily concerned to “establish Justice” when, in fact, no working definition of justice is agreed upon by the different political factions?

Our government works to “insure domestic Tranquility,” but this is mainly the responsibility of local officials,

not national policies or police.

The national government has done a good job in working to “provide for the common defence” of the republic, although our international relations too often reflect the demands of material prosperity over those of grace and truth.

Increasingly, national government takes a far too aggressive view of what it means “to promote the general Welfare.” The reams and reams of regulations, codes, and other forms of public policy by which the national government seeks to spread the wealth around are more a hindrance to “the Blessings of Liberty” than a help.

And as for “our Posterity” – the future of the nation – the government sponsors one of the least effective programs of education in the developed world, plunders the inheritances of heirs, permits the wanton sacrifice of unborn generations, and routinely puts the overall wellbeing of the financially economy in doubt by its policies of taxation and regulation.

We need a national government, to be sure, and in the grace economy of God’s Law, national governments are no less important than local governments. However, we need a government more like that envisioned in God’s Law and established by the Founders of this nation, and less like the one that presently is devoting the majority of its efforts to ensure that material prosperity is the privilege and possession of all Americans, whatever it takes.

*For reflection or discussion*

1. What were the two primary roles of a king in ancient Israel? Read Deuteronomy 17.14-20. What warnings did God set forth for central governments?
2. What is the Christian’s role in working to shape the course of the government at all levels of society? What can we do?
3. Suggest some ways that a local church can help to equip its members for more responsible Kingdom living with respect to our political responsibilities.

*Next steps: Are governments a reflection of the people they serve, or are the people they serve a reflection of the government that rules them? Discuss this question with a church leader.*

## 5 Inheritances

*“And you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘If a man dies and has no son, then you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter. If he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. If he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father’s brothers. And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the relative closest to him in his family, and he shall possess it.’” And it shall be to the children of Israel a statute of judgment, just as the Lord commanded Moses.” Numbers 27.8-11*

### *A familial trust*

In the grace economy outlined in God’s Law, property – thought of principally in terms of land – was considered a *familial* rather than a *personal* trust. People and families used their property as unto the Lord, to provide for their needs, care for their neighbors, and contribute to the overall wellbeing of their community.

It’s not that people did not own private property; they did. Rather, it is that *real* property, which we refer to as *real estate*, was to be held in trust by *families* in order to advance the purposes of God in creating just and stable communities. Upon the death of the owner, all property was to be passed on to his family, who would then be expected to continue the stewardship of that property in line with the requirements of love for God and neighbor.

In a grace economy, there is no role for civil government in the transfer of property from one generation to the next, except to ensure that lawful heirs receive what is lawfully theirs (cf. Ruth 4). The idea that the State should be allowed to commandeer a portion of the proceeds or net worth of an estate would have been regarded as a form of thievery by ancient Hebrews.

It should be similarly regarded in our day.

### *Warding off the State*

In our day people rely on carefully crafted wills and trusts to keep the State from seizing part or all of the inheritance they will leave behind upon their death. Estate taxes are a measure of the State’s sense of its ultimate authority to determine how best to allocate private property, whenever and wherever it can, running roughshod over individual responsibility, complicating relationships of love, and intruding into the peaceable lives of families and communities.

But in the economy outlined in God’s Law, the management of wealth was not a concern of civil government. Indeed, civil governments were regarded as evil whenever they cast their eyes on the property of private citizens (cf. 1 Kgs. 21).

Christians, in order to practice proper stewardship of the property entrusted to them, should seek out every available means of keeping their inheritances from falling into the hands of the State. Every penny unjustly confiscated by the State means less to transact for the purposes of grace and the Kingdom economy. Where laws and policies cannot be changed to preclude the State seizing a share of such transactions, they should be circumvented by every lawful means. The transfer of private property within the bounds of family should not provide the State an occasion for lining its coffers.

### *Property and stability*

Property in ancient Israel was a way of ensuring continuity of families and stability of communities. While our mobile society bears but little resemblance to the conditions of ancient Israel, the need for stable families and

communities is just as great, and the transfer of property from one generation to the next is merely one way to help ensure such conditions.

When the State claims a right to any portion of inheritances and estates, it exceeds the authority granted to it by God, and compromises its ability to serve the people for good. By violating the individual responsibility of the people, government foments resentment and anger, which then fuels self-seeking through the machinery of corrupt politics.

The only justification for inheritance and estate taxes is an opportunistic one: It gives the State the power to appropriate resources for its political ends, which are only superficially related to the common weal, but are largely motivated by political gain.

In the grace economy set forth in God's Law, all property is a gift from God, a trust to be worked and employed by families for the flourishing of justice and neighbor-love, unto the peace and prosperity of communities, and as a resource for future generations, that they might continue the economics of justice inherited from their forebears.

*For reflection or discussion*

1. Look at Ruth 4 and the role of the local magistrates in deciding this case. What do we learn from this about the role of government in economics?
2. What justification does our government make for taxing estates as they pass from one generation to the next? Is this legitimate?
3. Why do you suppose Americans continue to tolerate unjust government commandeering of private property through inheritance and estate taxes? Is this just?

*Next steps: Should church leaders teach church members how to keep their private property from coming into the hands of government? How should we prepare for the future transition of our property to our children? Talk with a fellow believer about these questions.*

## 6 Taxation

*“And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD’s. It is holy to the LORD.”* Leviticus 27.30

### *Paying for government*

The Law of God is silent concerning remuneration of public officials. Priests and Levites were to be supported by the tithe of the people in their communities. But it is not specified how the elders, judges, and local rulers – even the king – were to be supported.

Presumably, these people, being property owners like everyone else, except the priests and Levites, would have been working their land and realizing their provision from the stewardship of their property. This is perhaps the idea behind Solomon’s comment that a nation is blessed and happy when its rulers work on the land (Eccl. 5.9).

Moses’ warning against the tendency of civil magistrates to accumulate wealth was intended to warn the people of Israel against revenue schemes that might foster just such problems (Deut. 17.16, 17).

Nor does the Law say anything about public works projects – highways, sewers, and the like. We can assume that those who, in ancient Israel, required walled cities for their wellbeing would simply have banded together to meet their needs without the civil magistrate having to levy some formal burden of taxation to accomplish the needed objective.

### *The propriety of taxes*

At the same time, both Jesus and Paul affirmed the right of States to levy taxes upon the people they serve *as agents of God’s good purposes* (Matt. 22.21; Rom. 13.1-7). As States expanded and became more complex, and more services were required to support the needs of the governed, taxation became a logical and not unreasonable means of providing the revenue such services require.

However, it’s not too much to look at the example of the tithe as a way of thinking about the logic for tax policies. Graduated tax rates in this country have become the means for creating an entitlement society in which nearly half the population pay no income taxes at all and, thus, receive many services from the State at the expense of those who do pay taxes.

It’s not difficult to see how such a system of taxation can be used to curry favor and purchase political power, at the same time it creates resentment, fosters suspicion, and strains the national fabric.

### *A Biblical model?*

In a flat-rate tax system – as in the tithe of ancient Israel – the wealthy would pay more, but *really* and not *proportionately* so. Their rate of taxation would be the same for every citizen, though their contribution would be more. Under such a system, all who benefit from the services of the State would pay a share appropriate to their income. As in ancient Israel, where the wealthy would have paid more in tithes, but all were expected to tithe at the same rate, so a flat-rate income tax system would ensure that each citizen paid an equal measure for the good benefits received from the State.

At the same time, since *all* were required to pay – even those with very little or modest means – expectations

of what government should supply would be moderated, and the tendency of governments to seek more power through increased proportional taxation would be curbed.

Tax policies in America today are unjust and corrupt. They serve primarily the interests of those who hold political power and who make dependents of those who pay little or no taxes – increasingly, the majority of the population – at the expense of those who pay more. They frustrate individual responsibility for the management of wealth, diminish the role of local governments, and corrupt the social environment by breeding jealousy, greed, resentment, and anger.

The tax system that Americans endure today could bankrupt the nation's future. Before it does, those who understand and practice grace economics should use their powers of persuasion to seek a better system for financing government as the servant of God for good.

All such unjust policies should be opposed by those who seek an economics of justice rather than of material prosperity. Love for God and neighbor require that even in the area of taxes we seek the will of God and learn to live within the parameters of justice He has outlined in His Law.

*For reflection or discussion*

1. Why are taxes necessary? Who should pay them? How can we guard against taxation becoming excessive?
2. If we don't use something like the tithe as a model for our tax codes, where will we look to find one?
3. How are taxes susceptible to being hijacked for political purposes?

*Next steps: Government and economic activity have become inextricably entwined. Can Christians change this situation, if only within the Christian community? Get some friends together to share what you've been learning in this series, and to discuss these questions.*

## 7 The Future

*“You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the Lord your God is giving you.”* Deuteronomy 16.19, 20

### *An unstable pillar*

As I mentioned previously, and as is becoming increasingly clear amid our present economic crisis, material wealth can be a most unstable pillar on which to build one’s happiness. Greed, rather than *secure* the future of the nation, ultimately *saps* its moral fiber and *shreds* its social fabric.

As retirement accounts erode, property values decline, jobs evaporate, the national debt mounts, and the value of the currency declines, many Americans question whether our economics of materialism, as we have been pursuing it in recent generations – our *greed* economy of getting and spending – can produce the good life we envision. The cries to tax the wealthy more, in order to fund the dependent and the entitled, are little more than stop-gap thinking on the part of a people desperate to enjoy material prosperity for the present.

Meanwhile, those who should be pursuing a *grace* economy, in line with the demands of the Kingdom economy of God, seem to have little to offer in the way of hope for the future.

The wellbeing of the future will be built, not on material wealth, but on grace and justice. As long as the notion of justice in our society is treated as little more than a handmaiden to material wealth, the realization of true justice – love for God and neighbor – will continue to elude our society. While Christians do not deny the legitimacy of material wealth, the pursuit of prosperity is not to be the guiding factor in our lives or in the kinds of public policy we seek for our nation. God requires “justice, and only justice” (v. 20, ESV) as the guiding norm in social policies, and only an economy devoted to such a standard will be able to ensure a secure and prosperous future for the generations to come.

### *The defining norm*

Christians believe that grace and justice must be the defining norms of any economy. In a just economy, neighbor love will be the guiding factor. Children will be educated in the primacy of neighbor-love. Culture will reflect the dignity of human life and promote dignity, beauty, and the common weal rather than mere self-indulgence. Government will function not as an advocate for equality of wealth, but as a promoter of the general welfare, by ensuring that justice is the defining code of all public policy.

An economics based on grace and justice will go farther toward ensuring a secure future than an economics based on greed and material wealth. If such an economics – such a divine economy – is to have a more significant role in determining the course of America’s future, it must begin in the lives of those who understand the nature and value of justice, and who seek it through the Gospel of the Kingdom.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not inimical to the Law of God; indeed, Jesus taught that learning, obeying, and teaching God’s Law was the way to greatness in the Kingdom of God (Matt. 5.17-19). He Himself is the very embodiment of the Law of God; He walked its path as the Trailblazer for all who follow Him (1 Jn. 2.1-6).

The Law of God encodes the teachings of grace and the tenets of justice – of love for God and neighbor – which provide the stability any society requires to endure through even the most difficult trials (Matt. 22.34-40). The more Christians know of God’s Law, and the more they are able to embody it and to bring it to bear on the public policies of our nation, the more stable and secure our nation will be for the generations to

come. The more we ignore or neglect the Law of God, the more self-love will replace neighbor-love in our society (Matt. 24.12).

*The challenge to Christians*

The future wellbeing of this or any nation will not be secured in the amount and distribution of its material wealth, but in the degree to which it follows the teachings of grace, and the extent to which it practices justice, as defined by the Law of God.

Only the Gospel can liberate a person from the grip of greed. For the Gospel opens a vista on the Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit which shines with the brilliance of grace. Unless we truly embrace the Kingdom economy of God, and work to persuade our neighbors of the great benefits grace and justice can bring for all, we will consign our beloved nation to certain self-destruction by the claws of greed and self-interest.

It falls to the members of the Christian community to learn, practice, and work for grace economics, in which justice, based on the principles of neighbor-love outlined in the holy and righteous and good Law of God, set the tone for all our social, cultural, and commercial activity (Rom. 7.12).

*For reflection or discussion*

1. Do you think the Law of God gets as much attention as it should in your church? Why or why not?
2. Meditate on Psalm 1. What should be the place of the Law of God in the life of a righteous person?
3. How would you describe the relationship between the Gospel, the Kingdom of God, the Law of God, and our calling as disciples of Christ?

*Next steps – Transformation: What's one thing you can begin to do in order to more fully embrace the grace economy of God rather than the greed economy of our secular and materialistic age?*

*For reflection or discussion*

1. What do we mean by “individual responsibility”? To whom or what are we responsible? For what?
2. Does it make a difference whether economic transactions are governed by grace rather than greed? Explain.
3. Should local churches work together to bring more grace into their communities? How might they do that?
4. How should Christians try to influence the shape of politics and economics in this country?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this study? How are you planning to implement that lesson in your walk with and work for the Lord?

*Prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org) to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.