

Reframing Work: Living Wholly within God's Reign: Working with "stuff" in A God-Centered World

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Living and working within a God-centered world—participating in God's economy—means establishing a new standard of what is real and what is important. The New Creation inaugurated by Jesus Christ turns things upside down.

Our relationship with possessions is transformed in a God-centered world. For example, the Gospel of Matthew illustrates an alternative approach to material possessions: Three central teachings can be identified: (1) "You cannot serve God and mammon" (6:24). The story of the rich young man (19:16-30) tells of a pious Jew, following God's commandments and living a good life. Yet when confronted with Jesus' request to "go, sell what you possess...and come, follow me," his possessions appear to mean more than his salvation. (2) Acknowledging God as Lord affects the attitude that people have toward material goods. While it is true that life is "more than food, and the body more than clothing" (6:25), both food and clothing are good things (7:11) given by God. Jesus went so far as to liken the reign of God to a marvelous feast (22:1-14). Although appreciating material blessings as God's gifts, followers of Jesus are not to accumulate possessions or become unduly devoted to them. (3) God's people ought to regard material possessions as resources God trusts them to use as God wishes. Rather than storing up earthly treasures for personal use, devotion to God means devotion to the "least," to those who are hungry and thirsty, the stranger, those who are naked and sick, as well as those who are in prison (25:34-46).

With the gift of the Spirit comes the gifts of freedom and genuine hope—freedom from the need to construct our own identity in idolatrous slavery to possessions of very sort, and freedom to bestow ourselves in response to the needs of others; hope not in transitory and illusory security of possessions but in God's love poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

Footnoted:(Peter Vander Meulen, "Do Justice—Keep It Simple, in *Christian Reflection* (Baylor University, 2007), p. 61).

In the Genesis 1 account, all the created world and its resources and riches are pronounced "good." The biblical witness then goes on to envision their usage within the context of God's economy. While we tend to talk about "**our** money" and "**our** possessions," such ownership is illusory since all that exists belongs to God. As gracious gifts given by God, material goods are to be used for God's purposes. In other words, possessions are not ends in themselves, but have an instrumental value. In a God-centered world, through what human beings receive, make, and possess they are to honor God and participate in God's redemptive activity.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What happens when we believe that everything we have belongs to God?
2. What difference would it make in your relationship to material possessions – your stuff – to relate to these within the context of God's economy?
3. Read Gal. 5:16-25. This text invites us to "walk by the Spirit." We might not immediately relate this text to human work or our work lives. Consider these questions:
 - Where do you see evidence of the "works of flesh" within cultural views of work?
 - What changes if the goal of work life is the "fruit of the spirit"?