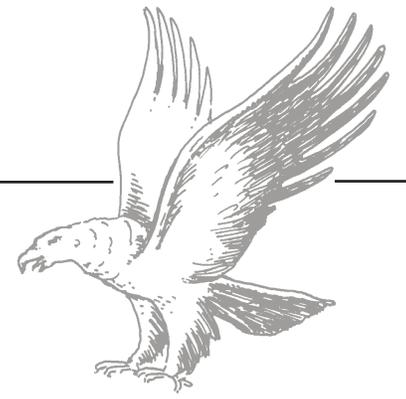


# Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”  
Isaiah 40:31*



August 20, 2017

## The Bible and Economic Inequality

The Bible is not a textbook on economics, but it does address the issues that play a role in economic inequality. The full picture may surprise us.

*“Disaster pursues sinners, but the righteous are rewarded with good. . . . The fallow ground of the poor would yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice” (Prov. 13:21, 23, ESV).*



These two verses in the book of Proverbs are separated by only one verse. Yet their respective messages seem to contradict each other, offering competing explanations for economic inequality in society. One verse argues that prosperity is the reward of righteous living. Work hard, be thrifty, exercise self-discipline, treat others with integrity, and you will prosper. The next verse bemoans the fact that personal effort is negated by injustice; that is, the strong enrich themselves at the expense of the weak. It doesn't matter how hard you work, the deck is stacked and in the end it is the ruthless who will win.

So which of these two versions of economic reality is valid?

Our society is currently being torn apart by proponents of these two positions. Conservatives insist that socio-

economic distress is the largely the result of a widespread failure of personal responsibility. People in increasing numbers are too lazy to get a job, so they mooch off the rest of society. In this view, the role of government should be to incentivize people to get to work. Liberals, on the other hand, argue that inequality is the result of built-in prejudices that rig the system against the disadvantaged, leaving them vulnerable to poverty and its evils. The role of government under this perspective is to eliminate the unjust social structures that serve as barriers to the little guy.

These two approaches to economic theory and policy are so incompatible, it seems there's no way they could ever be reconciled. Except that they both find a home in the Bible, just one verse apart. So not only is it *possible* to reconcile them, it's in our society's best interest to figure out how to do it.

The Bible clearly advocates personal responsibility, diligence, hard work, and thrift. *Generally speaking*, those who adopt such a personal regimen will do better in life. But the Bible just as

clearly argues that this world is crooked, and sometimes good people get burned, despite their efforts to do right. Justice for those who are oppressed is one of the identifying marks of a godly society.

So the conservative approach that insists everyone make their own way in life fails the compassion test, abandoning some good people to an undeserved fate. But the liberal approach that tries to artificially eliminate all unequal outcomes squashes personal motivation for success. Is there a middle ground?

Yes there is. The central theme of the gospel is salvation by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8); that is, God by His grace has—at great cost to Himself—made an undeserved reward accessible to us (a very liberal idea), on the condition that we surrender everything to Him, starting with our heart (a very conservative idea). That spiritual principle not only defines our relationship with God, it also influences our relationships with others. We do the very best we can out of gratitude for what God has done for us; and that includes being generous with those who are in need.

– David King



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