
STRATEGIES TO POSITION YOUR PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATION TO PROSPER FINANCIALLY



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Introduction

Nearly 51 years ago Dr. King's speech, at the National Conference on New Politics in 1967, foreshadowed that if we maintain our exploitive economic and political systems, then we'd get not only racial apartheid, but economic apartheid as well.

"We have diluted ourselves into believing into the myth that capitalism grew and prospered out of the Protestant ethic of hard work and sacrifice. The fact is capitalism was built on the exploitation and suffering of black slaves and continues to thrive on the exploitation of the poor — both black and white, both here and abroad."

The widening wealth gap proves we're still heading in that direction.

Interesting Facts About the Wealth Gap and The Church

- A 2013 Pew Research Center poll reports almost half of Americans believe the wealth gap is a serious moral problem.
- 56 million Protestants attend weekly worship in the USA and 13 million attend churches of 1,000 or more congregants.¹
- Churches receive over \$50b a year in donations.²
- One in five households has zero or negative wealth, according to a report by the Institute for Policy Studies. An even greater share of African-American (30%) and Latino

¹ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2014/september/how-727-megachurches-spend-their-money-leadership-network.html>

² <https://www.fastcompany.com/3039328/church-giving-tops-50-billion-a-year-in-us-and-its-future-is-not-a-collection-plate>

(27%) households are “underwater” financially. The combined impact of \$1 trillion in credit-card debt, \$1.4 trillion in student loan debt, and stagnant wages are taking a toll.³

- Even the Americans sitting on piles of cash aren't using it correctly to build wealth. The average American is holding too much cash in savings, and it's keeping them from building wealth. A study NerdWallet found that savers are missing out on an estimated \$140,000 in investment returns over 30 years — and that's assuming a conservative 6% return rate on stock market investments.⁴
- The wealth gap will increase more drastically for millennials, blacks and Hispanics. For most Americans, owning a home is a major factor in the accumulation of wealth. The overall homeownership rate for millennials, ages 25 to 34, was at 37 percent in 2015, which is 8 percentage points lower than the rates for the previous two generations — Gen X and the Baby Boomers — when they were the same age.⁵

Toward A Wealth Gap Theology

It is no accident that within our society and in other Western countries, Christianity has often appealed most to the wealthy, and that churches often prosper in well-off areas. – Rt Rev. John Packer, the Bishop of Ripon and Leeds

Equality lies at the heart of God but income inequality, in itself, is not a moral evil. Certainly, equality lies at the heart of God. The doctrine of the Trinity emphasizes the equality within the Godhead. Humans are equal because they are made in the image of the triune God (Genesis 1:27). In his speech to the Athenians (Acts 17:26), Paul affirms all nations are declared to have a common ancestor. John's gospel uses the image of Jesus lifted up on the cross that he may draw all people to himself (John 3:14, 12:32). The false assumption is that since all are equal in God's eyes that any wealth inequality is inherently immoral. This is a problematic conclusion, since there is not a single passage of Scripture that suggests that income inequality, in itself, is a moral evil⁶. Scripture does not assume Peter's only means to wealth is by robbing Paul's account. Biblically, wealth can be created (Deuteronomy 8:18-19, Proverbs 27:26) rather than merely transferred from one account to the other.

³ [Billionaire Bonanza 2017: The Forbes 400 and the Rest of Us](#), Institute for Policy Studies.

⁴ <https://www.businessinsider.com/when-to-invest-in-stocks-2018-7>

⁵ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/millennials-especially-latinos-blacks-own-fewer-homes-wealth-gap-will-n890476>

⁶ Joyce, Adam, *Economic Wisdom for Churches: A Primer on Poverty, Stewardship and Flourishing* Kindle Edition.

Economic fair balancing and rebalancing are biblical practices. Financial pressure always bears hardest upon those with less than enough. The newly formed church addressed wealth inequality as its first social issue in which to invoke the Kingdom of God (Acts 2:44-45). The wealthy congregant sold assets and donated the proceeds to the church congregants, so that, under the administration of the apostles, *“anyone who had need”* received economic support. *“Great grace was upon them all, for there was not a needy person among them”* (Acts 4:32–35). It is important to note this was not a governmental policy decision, nor a forced leveling demanded from the apostles, but rather, a voluntary generosity.

Likewise, In Paul’s second letter to the Macedonian churches, quoting Exodus 16:18. he asks them to donate money to poor Christians in Jerusalem. He writes, *“Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be [economic] equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is [economic] equality, as it is written: “The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.”*” (2 Corinthians 8:13-15 NIV).

The church must announce Kingdom principles and point out where the existing social order at any time is in conflict with them. It must be hearted and dispersed with the task of reshaping the existing order to conform to these Kingdom principles (Romans 12:2).

Economic and/or social justice is not exclusively a domain of liberation theology, it is near the heart of God. Scripture challenges us to recognize God’s concern and care for those in need (Luke 6:20 – blessed are you who are poor). Interestingly, ‘the poor’ are frequently mentioned in the same paragraph with their counterparts, ‘the rich’ (for example, Luke 16:19–31). In the Old Testament, God institutes laws, on behalf of the poor to protect them, give hope and regulate the conduct of those with abundance (Deuteronomy 24:10–15)⁷. His heart on the matter can be discerned by examining the types of God-approved legislation: Debts reduction programs, Fair lending and pay practices (Deuteronomy 15:11-15); Gleaning (Leviticus 19:9–10, Ruth 2:23); Provision for refugees (Deuteronomy 10:17–18). There are many other laws and passages, all of which, are a picture of a just society, from God’s point of view.

Critical Wealth Gap Questions for Today’s Churches

1. Will the disappearance of wealth be the end of the church?

⁷ Satlow, Michael L., *Judaism and the Economy: A Sourcebook* 1st Edition, Kindle Edition.

2. Are local churches biblically responsible to improve the economic conditions of the congregants and the community at large?
3. Is it biblically irresponsible for churches to only focus on extracting the 10% of earnings from its members without having regular discussions on what members should be doing with their other 90%?
4. Can taking funds from an insolvent member of a church who is barely surviving in this economy, especially when pressure is applied through emotional appeals or fear of Godly retribution, be considered exploitation? How does this reconcile with biblical teaching?
5. Millennials, blacks and Hispanics face high education debt, high rental costs, tight credit standards for mortgages and a shortage of affordable housing in urban, metropolitan areas. What can churches do to address reduction of debt, increasing savings and personal credit management?
6. How can churches increase overall home ownership as a strategy for increasing wealth?
7. Can financial education correct this problem? (Hosea 4:6)
8. How can churches teach and promote practical applications on how members can reap what they sow into the church in addition to inspirational preaching?
9. Should congregants be taught how to sell and position themselves and build additional revenue streams for themselves? Would doing so, cross the boundaries of orthodoxy?
10. Should churches feel obligated to invest in members' life skills and make it a top priority?

Some Current Models and Ideas

- AME Church and Black Banks Partnership
 - Increase deposits and loans with black banks;
 - Increase black homeownership to over 50 percent nationwide. This means 2,000,000 more black homeowners than now exist; and
 - Grow the number of black businesses from 2.6 million to 4 million and total gross receipts from an average of \$72,500 to \$150,000.
- Anglican Church Action on Poverty
 - Advocate for Fair tax and Fair Pay
- Individual Development Account Program
 - Matched savings for low to moderate income families for investment in education, home ownership or small business
- Support congregational entrepreneurs, social buying networks
- Financial education

- Saving challenges
- Economic development
- Housing programs – NACA
- Micro lending