

The Consequences of Ideas

Lesson 11: Transition to the Modern Era

Do you work because you have to, to make money, or to glorify God? What is the world's view of work is it good or evil? Is it a curse? What is your view?

I. Introduction

- a. Aristotle was the dominant influence on Western thought from 300BC to the period of the Enlightenment in the mid-1500's. There were **several** factors that worked both to overthrow Aristotle's system and to preserve it.
- b. First of all, Aristotle's theories relied very little on **experiment**, which left them vulnerable to anyone who chose to perform such experiments.
- c. However, attacking one part of Aristotle's system involved attacking the **whole thing**, which made it a daunting task for even the greatest thinkers of the day.
- d. Secondly, the Church had grafted Aristotle's theories onto its theology, thus making any attack on Aristotle an **attack** on the tradition and the Church itself.
- e. Finally, there were the Renaissance scholars who were uncovering other Greek authors who **contradicted** Aristotle. This was unsettling, since these scholars had a reverence for all ancient knowledge as being nearly infallible.
- f. However, finding contradicting authorities in the ancient literature forced the Renaissance scholars to figure out which **ideas** were right.
- g. This **encouraged** skepticism, freethinking, and experimentation, all of which are essential parts of modern science and contributed to the development of modern philosophical ideas.
- h. On other fronts, reliance on Church dogma waned and science ascended to a position of primacy as the basis of man's **knowledge**; a significant change was taking place that would shape the next five hundred years of Western thought.
- i. As populations were shifting from farms to cities a **merchant class** emerged during this period and a complete reversal of thought was underway in terms of how society viewed money and wealth.
- j. Several historic factors coincided to bring about the tremendous paradigm shift in the way society viewed money and wealth and **Capitalism** emerged as the new economic model.

II. The Emergence of Capitalism

- a. Prior to the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods, money had little value because the economy was **driven** by bartering and few people had actual money.
- b. In addition, the Church had taught that the pursuit of wealth was an **evil desire** which would lead one away from the spiritual life so individuals were dis-incentivized to accumulate wealth.
- c. As the authority of the Catholic Church weakened over the cities and states of Europe, a concomitant sense of **independence** from the dogma of the Church prevailed.
- d. After the Protestant Reformation, **John Calvin**, a leading theologian in the post-reformation age, presented a Biblical perspective which posited a completely different view of money and wealth.
- e. Although Calvin did not develop an economic theory, in writing about the "calling of God" as it pertains to **vocation**, he opined that the believer should epitomize industry, workmanship, and achievement to the Glory of God.
- f. His ideas emphasized not only the salvation of the individual through grace in Christ, but also raised the issue of labor or vocation to a position of theological **significance**.
- g. He also dismissed the argument (based upon the writings of **Aristotle**) that it is wrong to charge interest for money because money itself "is barren" (meaningless).
- h. The proper issue was identified by Calvin as being one of heart condition, not money per se. He redefined usury as the **exorbitant** collection of interest rather than the mere collection of interest on money loaned.
- i. He qualified his view on usury by saying that money should be lent to people in dire need without hope of **interest**, while a modest interest rate of 5% should be permitted in relation to other borrowers.
- j. Calvin thought that one's intention ought to be to glorify God; the creation of wealth was but a **by-product** of hard work. In this way, he believed, one's life's work was given true dignity and purpose.
- k. This single change in the way people thought about money and wealth allowed all believers to strive for the "pursuit of happiness" and financial gain without feeling **guilty** that God had blessed them with material success.
- l. As the accumulation of money became more commonplace, those who had financial resources began to think about their **stewardship** of what God had given them and they began looking for ways to put their capital to work.
- m. Hence, the idea of lending money out with an eye to return on investment was now seen as a **godly** enterprise and thus supported European exploration. Capitalism became the enabling vehicle for exploration.

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- n. As European monarchs grew in authority and power they needed to **extend** their holdings and this meant they needed to control additional lands. This additional land was obtained either through war or exploration.
- o. **Exploration** by sea produced many new territories for Portugal, Spain, England and France. This exploration and the settlement of these newly acquired lands cost large sums of money.
- p. The funds of the monarchs was limited so wealthy merchants were solicited as **partners** in the exploration enterprise. Capitalism was thus ensconced as a vital economic model for the sustained economic growth of nations.

III. The Blessings of Labor

- a. For many people today, the idea of work is not very interesting or even desirable but this attitude is quite **modern** and does not fit God's economic design.
- b. Economics is management of the property that ultimately belongs to **God** over which he has placed a steward and over which that steward will be held accountable. *Matt 25:26-28 His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. KJV*
- c. God is the original **worker** and He has given us eight principles that drive His economic model: *Gen 2:2 And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. KJV*
 - 1. **All things** belong to God *Ps 50:12 If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. KJV*
 - 2. God has appointed man to be a creative steward of His goods with "**ownership**" rights. *Gen 1:28 God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. KJV*
 - 3. **Theft** of another's goods is wrong. Taking another's intangible property, excessive/oppressive taxation, forced redistributive wealth; devaluing another's goods or money; destroying another's goods or means of production *Ex 20:15 Thou shalt not steal. KJV*
 - 4. **Coveting** your neighbor's goods is wrong. Economic forms of coveting: Class envy, demand for redistributive rights; *Ex 20:17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." NIV*
 - 5. Skills and abilities to work **come from** God *Deut 8:18 But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, KJV*
 - 6. Work is **not** a result of the fall. Because God works, man works. Work is profitable, good and to be pursued; laziness is not virtuous. *Prov 14:23 All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty. NIV*
 - 7. Love God and not your **goods**. *Matt 6:19-20 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, NIV*
 - 8. Be **compassionate** and generous to those in need with your goods and money. *Prov 19:17 He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward him for what he has done. NIV*
- d. From God's perspective allowing the poor to work provides dignity of the human person. Through work man **must** earn his daily bread and contribute to his own needs as well as the needs of others. *2 Thess 3:10 that if any would not work, neither should he eat. KJV*
- e. Communities have a responsibility to create jobs for the poor but not to give them handouts. It is not the duty of the **State** to provide. Individuals and communities must provide for their own. *1 John 3:17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? NIV*
- f. In order to help the poor we must have an economic system that is wealth **producing**; therefore, if no one has wealth then no one will have enough to share with those in need. Jobs come from those who produce wealth.
- g. The poor should not be viewed as victims but ought to be seen as capable innovators within themselves. The shackles that hold the poor back are the very programs that the **government** has designed to help them. *1 Sam 8:11-17 "This is what the king who will reign over you will do: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. Your menservants and maidservants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. NIV*

IV. Application

- a. The Body of Christ more than anyone else ought to know and understand what work actually means when seen from God's perspective. We ought also to be able to recognize the lies of the devil and how our culture has corrupted the purpose and dignity of work for man.
- b. The world will attempt to take the idea of work and turn it into some thing that is boring, drudgery, something that you suffer through. Many will say that profit and wealth is evil in and of itself. To what extent have you bought into the lie of the world about work?
- c. Does your work praise God?