

Special Section on the “Proper” Application of Scripture to Business and Economics

A Word From the Editor

As an “association,” the Christian Business Faculty Association is a rather loosely-linked confederation of Christians who have agreed to four principles:

Jesus Christ is the Son of God and through his atonement is the mediator between God and man.

The Word of God expressed in the Bible is inspired by God and is authoritative in the development of Christian faith and practice.

The Christian faith has significant implications for the structure and practice of business.

Developing Christian education for business practice should be undertaken as a cooperative venture of this organization.

These principles are clear enough to provide a sufficient common bond of fellowship, yet general enough to provide the freedom for significant differences in interpretation on even substantive matters.

Of specific importance for this section of the **JBIB** is Principle 2 and how we are to understand the character of the Scripture that frames the Christian worldview we bring to the understanding of the “structure and practice of business.” In its “Statement of Purpose” the **JBIB** notes that the journal “is committed to the proposition that ‘All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work’ (II Timothy 3:16-17).” All CBFA members have agreed to the central importance of an inspired and authoritative Scripture. To what, however, have we really agreed? And to what, however, have we agreed to allow disagreement?

In the fall of 1997, Dr. Richard Chewning presented his paper, “Biblical Orthodoxy Requires the S.N.A.P. of Scripture,” at the Christian Business Faculty Association annual meeting. His paper was a

strong and articulate defense of the sufficiency, necessity, authority, and perspicuity of Scripture.

That paper generated a great deal of discussion during the conference, and as a result, I decided that reprinting his paper, along with responses to that paper, would generate the kind of dialogue that the **JBIB** is seeking to establish both among CBFA members and, more broadly, among all the readers of the **JBIB**. In the process of developing this dialogue, we received two manuscripts at different times which also spoke eloquently to the issue of biblical hermeneutics in business applications. It then became apparent that Chewning’s paper and responses, and these two manuscripts, would provide a foundation for a section devoted to a discussion about a matter of central importance to members of the CBFA.

The purpose of this section is not to “settle” the issue of the character and role of Scripture in framing and informing discussions related to faith-work issues. Rather, the hope is that as readers encounter the various perspectives, they will be led to examine their own presuppositions. The authors of

the material in this section raise a variety of intriguing questions:

- Does Scripture, standing alone, contain sufficient content (not exhaustive content) to render it absolutely reliable as a guide to all moral and salvific matters that are to be faced in any society at any time?

- What is the relationship between general and special revelation—or, “How does faith seek understanding?”

- To what degree do presuppositions, especially those imbedded deeply in our cultural traditions, necessarily color our understanding of Scripture?

- Are there areas of business and economic theory to which the Bible does not speak?

- How do we properly understand Scripture as both “inspired by God” and yet written by a variety of real people in different locations at different times?

- How do we properly apply different forms of biblical literature (psalms, proverbs, prophecy, letters) to contemporary issues in business and economics?

One of the great joys of serving as editor of the **JBIB** is the continuing challenge to

understand and then respond to perspectives that differ from my own. I have found that differences can occur at a variety of levels:

1. There are differences of **application**. Two people can agree on the meaning of a scriptural passage but differ in the conclusions to be reached in application of that passage. For instance, is Proverbs 22:7, “The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower becomes the lender’s slave” (NAS), an admonition to avoid debt at the personal or an organizational level? And is the proverb an admonition to the lender or the borrower?

2. There are differences of **articulation**. Two people can agree that Scripture is “inspired by God” and yet disagree on the proper understanding of a passage. For instance, the NIV translation of Proverbs 22:7 is “The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is *servant* to the lender” (emphasis mine). Being a servant and being a slave are not necessarily the same. The difference is over the “proper” interpretation of the Hebrew word *ebed* which is translated over 700 times as “servant” in the King James Version and about 20 times as “bondage” or “bondman.”

3. There are differences of **aggregation**. Two people can examine a set of biblical passages and arise at different assertions of a general principle. For example, two people could read a series of passages about wealth in the book of Proverbs and one conclude that the accumulation of wealth presents a variety of obstacles to Christians, while another conclude that the accumulation of wealth is a sign of wise stewardship.

4. There are differences of **assumption**. Two people can examine the Bible with very different assumptions about its fundamental character. One might view a portion of Scripture as being confined in application to a particular time/space period while another assumes that the Scripture speaks to a universal principle. For example, does Paul’s statement in I Corinthians 14:34-35, “Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak...if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home...” (NAS), address a specific issue in the Corinthian church at the time of Paul’s letter or is it meant to provide guidance for the conduct of churches today?

Whatever the source of our differences, the challenge as Christian scholars in business is to walk in this tension: *maintaining commitment* to our individual beliefs while *sustaining conversation* with those whose beliefs differ from our own. Our differences can serve to divide us or develop us, depending on whether we see those differences as barriers or bridges.

The **JBIB** is committed to acting as a bridge over which Christian scholars in business might travel together, even if their ultimate destinies take them in different directions. This special section on biblical hermeneutics in business is a call for all of us at the intersection of biblical principles and business perspectives to think deeply about what we believe and why.

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