



GODONOMICS

**How to Save Our Country
—and Protect Your Wallet—
Through Biblical Principles of Finance**



CHAD HOVIND

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MULTNOMAH
BOOKS

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PREFACE

For nearly twenty years I have pastored churches in a variety of settings—from the small town of Groveland, Illinois, where I grew up to the pastoral staff of Moody Memorial Church in downtown Chicago. I've been part of nondenominational church plants in Georgia and more recently in Cincinnati. Some of the churches where I ministered were homogenous, while others were multiracial. Some congregations were predominantly “blue state,” while others were predominantly “red state.” I have worked hard not to paint God, Jesus, and the Bible with a political overlay.

The congregation I pastor today is filled with people who hold a myriad of political positions—from strongly conservative to moderate to liberally minded. Like me, they have found that God's grace in the message of the Cross unifies people across racial, social, political, and economic lines. They have discovered the value and importance of discussing beliefs and issues, God's will for individuals and nations, and sharing views on the great challenges that face us as Christians and Americans. All of these concerns apply to us as we attempt to understand and apply the Bible's teachings to everyday life.

That doesn't mean there aren't differing opinions and disagreements among church members. But if you were to meet my church members, whether they reflect the views of management or labor, Democrat or Republican, black or white, you will find we enjoy the freedom to disagree agreeably. We treat one another with respect and openness, regardless of where each of us might land on the big issues.

And while we enjoy the give and take of discussions about faith, what it means to follow Jesus, and a Christian's responsibilities in a free society, we all agree that the Bible is authoritative in all matters. Though Scripture does not suggest a particular political program for implementing Jesus's command to "do unto others," it does provide clear principles that intersect and transcend culture. The Bible speaks to all areas of life: marriage, government, finances, freedom, life, civil rights, prosperity, economics, science, and history.

As I wrote *Godonomics*, I realized I was entering potentially divisive territory. I was entering the Bermuda Triangle of "no-no's," speaking about God, money, and politics all at the same time. I have tried to present both the absolutes and the clear implications of God's unchanging precepts. Political and economic systems change, but God and His Word never change. Meanwhile, writing a book about economics always has political implications, which can be inherently divisive. My hope is that *Godonomics* will create a new context to think, dialogue, and reason together as fellow Americans, rather than raise issues that will be used to demonize one another. By appealing to an impartial, historic standard to measure our opinions and commitments, I hope to create a tool for healthy and helpful discussion, not division.

That said, you will find that *Godonomics* encourages every Christ-follower to venture into the minefield of politics and to help influence our nation's economic system. My hope is that every follower of Christ will humbly examine the call to public service in local, state, and federal leadership. As I write these words, I acknowledge that as I wrote this book, I struggled with the fear that I would be labeled one of "those" pastors who mixes religion and politics. Worse than that, I wade in with both feet, discussing religion, politics, and money. However, it is necessary to do so. These subjects have been left without deep philosophical and biblical insight for too long. Not since the groundbreaking work of Francis Schaeffer has the biblical worldview been pushed boldly and strategically into the public forum.

I am not saying that other efforts have been ineffective or that I am the

next Francis Schaeffer. But I am a pastor who feels called to speak out on issues of personal and family finance as well as our nation's economy and monetary policies. As I mentioned, it is impossible to do this without also addressing political issues and the biblical principles and values that guided our nation's founding, and doing so in a great variety of settings. These are critical issues, and I am committed to speaking, writing, and providing other resources that can help Americans understand our nation's spiritual heritage and how our leaders have lost sight of much that made our nation stand out in the world. (For more on this, go to www.godonomics.com.)

I am a follower of Christ and a student of history, science, philosophy, and the Scriptures. I have walked with skeptics, seekers, and fellow Christians in discovering the Bible's historically reliable and life-changing message. I have found the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ to be not only the narrow path to eternal life but also the grounds for tolerance toward people of all beliefs and in all walks of life. A paradox is found at the core of the Bible's claims: truth and grace.

The Bible presents the truth about ourselves, life, the world, and God. These claims occasionally overlap with other world philosophies and religions, but more often than not they stand apart. They present a unique, countercultural vision and worldview that challenges every other value system. The teachings of the Bible challenge assumptions made by Greeks/Romans, Nietzsche/Freud, pharaohs/kings, Socrates/Plato, and the religious as well as the irreligious.

The message of the gospel contradicts both the moralist view of the religiously devoted and the immorality of the pagan. It challenges the hopelessness of naturalism while inviting the agnostic to come and see. It humbles the religious adherent who has found comfort in self-righteousness while offering a way to exalt the outcast. It unveils a mind-blowing kaleidoscope into the nature of God. He is revealed to be more loving, wise, just, beautiful, holy, accepting, approachable, and powerful than anyone would imagine.

I hope *Godonomics* will challenge you to experience more productivity,

more prosperity, and more generosity than ever before. By presenting clear evidence of our Founding Fathers' political rationale for establishing and governing a free society, I hope you will understand and appreciate anew your God-given rights. May the historic facts and biblical truth not only challenge your political theories but transcend them to clarify your political convictions.

You should know, before we begin, that the Bible is the source of what I believe and the basis for how I live. I want to reason with you from Scripture, history, evidence, and logic why our nation is now on the wrong track economically. At the same time, I want to introduce you to the Jesus you may never have experienced.

I am thankful for my congregation at Horizon Community Church for giving me a platform to dialogue with explorers and Christ-followers alike.

I am thankful for the trust given to me by the hundreds of attendees who come each week, open to being equipped, challenged, or persuaded.

I am so grateful for my wife of eighteen years, Beth Hovind. (Or is it nineteen years?) I am humbled that God has given us three wonderful children to love and laugh with: Sierra, Javan, and Quinn.

I am also thankful to Moody Bible Institute, where I pursued undergraduate and graduate work, and the Willow Creek Association, with whom I have pastored for the last twenty years.

I am also thankful for the video team at www.godonomics.com who turned the teaching of Godonomics into a six-session video curriculum for use in churches, small groups, patriotic events, schools, and even homeschool environments.

I am honored to work with a great creative team, led by Paul Tate, which creates and presents the most inspiring, challenging, and creative services each week.

Finally, I am thankful for our church elders, executive board, and staff, who work with me to create an irresistible environment every week to welcome both the convinced and the unconvinced.

What Does God Say About Economics?

What you don't know can hurt you. We ignore the power of ideas at our own peril. All ideas, right or wrong, have spiritual, practical, or economic consequences.

Economics is an inexact science at best. Economists draw from the study of mathematics, statistics and probability, past economic trends, and a guiding philosophy that a particular school of economic theory provides the brightest light to follow. It's a little like weather forecasting, except that meteorology doesn't affect your retirement by getting mixed up in political skirmishes and power struggles at the highest levels of government. Not to mention that a faulty weather forecast will never destroy your family's finances or blot out a secure economic future.

Don't dismiss these possibilities as things that happen only in other countries or to other people. You and your family, your friends and neighbors, and the country you love can all be caught in the aftermath of a financial hurricane if America continues on its irresponsible and unsustainable economic path.

Here is what our leaders in both major parties do not seem to understand: political solutions can never put us on a sound economic footing. Politics is not interested primarily in the good of the nation. Instead, politics has to do with gaining and exercising power over your opponents, rewarding your biggest donors, and benefitting the priority constituencies of your party. If, in doing these things, you also accomplish something that is good for the

country at large, that's great. But such an outcome is more an afterthought in the political process than it is a primary focus.

That might sound cynical, but if you fear I have cast my lot with the naysayers rather than choosing to work for a solution, keep reading. Recognizing why things are not working is the first step toward correcting the things that have gone terribly wrong.

The problem is that our nation's leaders look to deals and compromise to determine policy and enact legislation, and they are guided by political and economic ideologies that shape their values and priorities. They need, instead, the guidance of a fixed standard and a voice that speaks outside of our time and culture. In a world filled with donkeys, elephants, and rhinos, we need a lion that can roar timeless, common-sense principles that are not beholden to any party, time period, or cultural shift.

What our nation's leaders have missed is the one reliable, unfailing source of direction and wisdom that is available to us. If we continue to ignore God's guidance in the economic realm—at the levels of individuals, families, and the nation—we can be sure we'll end up losing even more of our freedom and personal wealth. We will be living in a country weakened by economic failure and wondering how the greatest nation in history could have been brought to such a depressing state of financial and ethical bankruptcy.

But that doesn't have to happen. The voice of the people can still carry the day. I am not suggesting a new Reformation that takes on a political identity. Nor am I calling for a theocracy in which Americans would be required to adhere to the doctrines of Christianity. In our republic, the voice and will of a majority of the citizens still possess the power to move our nation in a different direction—if we are united.

Why Godonomics?

What is Godonomics, and why is it the best way to solve the deepening economic dilemma we face as a nation, as families, and as individuals? Godo-

nomics is, as the name suggests, God's teachings and wisdom in the realm of finance and economics. When you study the Bible, you find that God's agenda for nations, families, and individuals is not hard to understand. But it is not easy to apply, either. It requires commitment, restraint, godly priorities, hard work, and generosity, among other virtues. These words are not used a lot in political campaigns, because candidates for office prefer to paint their policies in terms of solutions that won't require hardship, sacrifice, or major shifts in priorities. God, of course, is not swayed by the results of opinion polls or the planks in a party platform.

And here is what is so refreshing in the principles of Godonomics: they make perfect sense. Speaking to us today through the scribes who recorded God's message over millennia, God's plan for economic sanity, financial responsibility, and prosperity apply directly to the mess we are in today. Americans need to know that the options are not limited to Democratic, Republican, Libertarian, Socialist, Tea Party, and all other groups working to gain influence and power. While each one claims to have the secret to solving our broken economy, only God's principles will lead us out of the quagmire we're in. I believe that when Godonomics becomes widely known, and more and more people begin to apply God's principles at home, in their businesses, and in their communities, they will see for themselves that this is the solution we've been looking for.

Today's failed economic policies are nothing new. In the chapters that follow, we will look at ancient kings who seem to have taken their cues straight from John Maynard Keynes—except that Keynes would not be born for another three thousand years. We will look at the words and thinking of God-inspired leaders from Israel who recorded wisdom on leadership, government, citizenship, and personal responsibility—all of which helped guide the founders of the United States as they created our nation's legal and constitutional foundation. The same ancient wisdom undergirded the economic system that helped establish America as the most secure and prosperous country on earth.

Beyond that, the first Christ-followers applied these principles as individuals and families, and in congregations and fellowships. God's instructions are not vague or hard to understand. They simply require single-mindedness, hard work, generosity, and steadfast commitment. But following His instructions brings unmatched freedom, opportunity, and self-directed prosperity.

Godonomics seeks to bring God's economic principles to the forefront, so we can set our lives, our families' futures, and our nation on a sound financial footing—now and for the future. But there is a second—even more important—reason why Godonomics is so crucial. A rapidly growing movement has lured believers away from God's principles on finances and convinced them that socialism is, according to Scripture, the economic system that is most consistent with God's will.

Younger Christians, especially, are intrigued by persuasive Christian authors, speakers, and bloggers who emphasize giving priority to helping the poor by taking from others or empowering intrusive governments. They use the term *social justice* to advocate a shift of the economic balance in favor of those who are not producing wealth. They justify this stance with verses from the Bible, primarily from the Sermon on the Mount, the book of Acts, or selections from the Old Testament, without seeing the broader contexts. Growing numbers of younger Christians, who are largely unaware of the divine wisdom behind Godonomics, now consider socialism to be the economic system that God endorses. Advocates of this teaching do not call it socialism, of course. They use words such as *compassion*, *justice*, even *gospel*, to legitimize their goal of shifting wealth away from those who are productive and creating opportunities for others, and toward those who are said to be disadvantaged and marginalized.

I have pastored inner-city congregations that aggressively addressed the challenge and harm of generational poverty. I also have pastored suburban churches that are insulated from the plight of starving neighbors. I've been humbled to lead people from a variety of perspectives: One church was ra-

cially diverse while others were lily white. Some congregations were predominantly “blue state,” while others were much more politically conservative. I’ve learned that people of all backgrounds and perspectives love our country, have a common-sense approach to life, and are not nearly as divided personally as the leaders they elect portray.

It is time for Christians and all Americans to join together to protect our heritage and to restore strength, stability, and prosperity to our nation. At the same time, it is essential that this be done from the bottom up, generated by individuals and families who take seriously God’s wisdom on managing and stewarding their finances. Change will begin to take place only when citizens—both Christian and otherwise—act on the framework and guidelines upon which our nation was built. That is when we will see families prosper and our nation regain economic strength.

In the chapters that follow, we will look at the ideas and outcomes of leading thinkers and practitioners. We will examine policies based on economic theories that produced wealth and elevated the standard of living across the board, as well as those that weakened capitalism and, as a result, our nation. We will take a close look at capitalism’s most influential foe, Karl Marx, and the current American spokesman for the rechristened social gospel, Jim Wallis, head of Sojourners.

There is nothing more personal than your next paycheck, your financial future, and your family’s freedom, security, and well-being. So let’s see what God would say if He were talking individually to the economic thinkers and political leaders who shape and enact the policies that govern our country. These are the policies that have an impact in your town, in your home, and on your wallet. Let’s get started.

PART 1

If God Were Talking to America's Founders

It Is No Accident That God Endorses Capitalism

All economic systems are not equal

In the earliest days of what became the Massachusetts Bay Colony, a group we know as the Pilgrims landed on Cape Cod and established a settlement. They were not wearing belt buckles on their hats, but it is true that they came to the New World with the dream of finding liberty and prosperity by building a new way of life. Governor William Bradford's group adopted a charter requiring them to practice communal living, or socialism. It sounded like a great concept. Everyone would work for the common good by farming the land together and sharing their produce equally.

They were religious and moral people, so their experiment in centralized economics seemed godly, sensible, and relatively easy to implement. Why wouldn't this devoted group take part energetically in the labor as well as share freely the products of their labor? Well, it looked good on paper.

The first months were devastating. Many of the colonists were seemingly too busy to work the fields. Others didn't feel physically able to work and assumed that others would make up for their absence. In the first year, an alarming 50 percent of the Pilgrims who settled at Plymouth died from starvation. Harsh weather worked against them, but a second devastating condition was something they could have avoided. Their stores of food were insufficient to keep the entire colony healthy and well fed. Too many of the available workers failed to do their part, so not enough food was grown to feed the colony.

Bradford tried to rally the group with a stirring reminder that if they did not join together to get the necessary work done, more people would die. One year later, hundreds more perished. Again, too many had chosen not to do their part. Could it be that the first New World experiment in socialism was so misguided that lives were lost as a result? How could immigrants who had found a place where they could practice their faith according to their consciences allow such a deadly outcome when they had the power to prevent it?

Property Rights, Incentive, Freedom

Bradford decided to search the Scriptures and seek insight from God. He found three principles that saved the village and possibly even the great nation that would follow. The foundational principles were property rights, incentive, and freedom. In the Bible, he discovered a blueprint for a new economic system.

Throughout Scripture we see clear guidance on finances. When God brought His people out of Egypt and taught them to live in a new land as free people, He gave them ten building blocks for society. Among the Ten Commandments, God said, “Do not covet or steal someone else’s house or donkey...” (see Exodus 20:15, 17). Laws against envy and theft make it clear that God honors an individual’s right of ownership. By God’s decree, each person would have ownership of his or her personal belongings, such as cattle and land. Bradford noted that the concept of property rights appeared throughout the Scripture, including Acts 5:1–4, where Ananias’s field was his own to dispose of as he pleased.

On the second foundational principle, incentive, Bradford was surprised that the Scriptures spoke so decisively: “If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10); “Give her [the virtuous wife] of the fruit of her hands” (Proverbs 31:31); “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain” (Deuteronomy 25:4).¹

Bradford called a town meeting and notified the colonists they would no longer operate according to the old model. It had allowed shirkers to share in the produce that came from the labor of others. The unforeseen, disastrous outcome was that the workers who had done their part were unable to produce enough food to feed the entire community. In place of their early experiment in socialism, Bradford implemented the basics of capitalism by giving families the freedom to work their own land to grow their own food and to produce any other goods as they saw fit. There was no central economic authority assigning duties or managing details of production. It was up to each family to determine how they would utilize their property and resources to provide for their needs.

Bradford formulated the colony's new economic system based on the three principles that God had given the Hebrews: property rights, incentive, and personal freedom.

With work now being conducted under the rules of the new system, something amazing happened. Husbands and wives, children and relatives, all worked together on their own farms. Each person and family had incentive to work hard to provide for themselves and those they felt responsible for.

The result was a bumper crop. There was such a large harvest that families had food for themselves and plenty left over to share with others. Thus, they celebrated the first Thanksgiving with turkey feasts and thanked God for His provision and wisdom. Bradford wrote about this experiment in his journal, warning future generations that socialism doesn't work. Collectivism may sound like the perfect answer for right-thinking people, but the results in the Massachusetts Bay Colony were devastating.² If socialism didn't work in this best-case scenario with devout Christians, why would we think a less-than-ideal paradigm would work? In other words, if a mostly devout Christian community in the past couldn't make it work, is there any hope Washington, DC, will get it right today?

God's economic principles of property rights, incentive, and personal freedom are central to what I refer to as Godonomics. The value of this economic system was not limited to the ancient Hebrews when they were headed to their new homeland in Canaan. And the effectiveness of this system did not end with America's earliest European immigrants. Personal freedom, incentive, and property rights are universal principles, serving as the bedrock of a free-market economy. In later chapters we'll discuss the first two. For now, let's take a closer look at property rights.

Property Rights

Property rights are referred to in two of the Ten Commandments. We are warned not to envy someone else's house or horse—wishing that something belonging to another person was ours (see Exodus 20:17). Another commandment, “You shall not steal,” is a direct statement that because ownership is specific to a person, you have no right to appropriate what does not belong to you (Exodus 20:15).

God respects a person's right to ownership so much that He forbids our even wanting to own what belongs to another. Beyond that, actually taking what does not belong to you is a legal issue. Why should you or I avoid taking something that is not ours? Because God has established that someone else owns the rights to that asset. For the Hebrews, this law meant that no longer would a “Pharaoh” own the land they worked and lived on as they moved into their new land and future together. They, not the community or leader, would *individually* own property. No longer would the strongest and most powerful militia determine who owns and controls the resources and wealth on the basis of survival of the wickedest.

Property rights serve as the key contrast between socialism and capitalism. There is confusion today among Americans as to the meaning of these words and the economic system each represents. For example, a person might characterize capitalism as a system that relies on greed to drive economic suc-

cess and socialism as the system that emphasizes generosity by caring for the disadvantaged. But when each system is exercised in society, the results reveal the exact opposite.

Here are working definitions of the two major economic systems:

- *Capitalism*: the free exchange of privately owned goods and services
- *Socialism*: state control and state ownership of industry and property

Private ownership of property ensures personal freedom (another foundational principle of a free-market economy) because it emphasizes that the individual is more important than the state. Was Spock correct in *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* when he said, “Logic clearly dictates that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few?”³ Does the Borg’s collectivism justify assimilation of the individual? According to God, the answer is no.

C. S. Lewis provided a clear summation of the biblical worldview:

Christianity asserts that every individual human being is going to live forever, and this must be either true or false.... If individuals live only seventy years, then a state, or a nation, or a civilization, which may last for a thousand years, is more important than an individual. But if Christianity is true, then the individual is not only more important but incomparably more important, for he is everlasting and the life of the state or civilization, compared with his, is only a moment.⁴

The difference between socialism and free-market capitalism is massive. Socialism believes the individual should serve the state. But the Bible is clear that, in a free society, the state is the protector of an individual’s rights. The two perspectives are diametrically opposed.

If God gave rights to individuals at the creation of humanity, then individuals hold the power. They might choose to loan certain rights to the state

for select purposes. For example, individuals might want their local community to employ firefighters and law-enforcement personnel. To make that possible, they would vote for a reasonable tax levy. In return, the local government protects citizens and their property against the danger of fire and enforces laws.

However, if rights are held by the state, then rights are arbitrary. They can be granted or withdrawn at the determination of the state. The state might decide that to ensure the greater good, certain rights need to be restricted. Such a statist system is foreign to the teachings of the Bible.

The state cannot grant rights to individuals, since our rights are God-given and hard-wired into us. The role of the state is to *protect* God-given rights. When the state attempts to overrule God's role as the Grantor of rights, it is putting itself in the place of God, which is evil. This is one reason why socialism is a failed economic system. It is also the reason why God opposes socialism and advances the foundations on which capitalism is based.

God could give us the principles for any economic system imaginable. Remember our working definitions of capitalism and socialism:

- *Capitalism*: the free exchange of privately owned goods and services
- *Socialism*: state control and state ownership of industry and property

God chose to endorse the building blocks of capitalism thousands of years before it was given that label. Remember that since God owns everything, He could have chosen to grant temporary, earthly ownership to the state rather than to individuals. But based on His perfect knowledge of the future and knowing how societies work best for the benefit of the people, God chose to place rights in the hands of the individual. So why, today, is there such a vocal movement favoring the shift of rights away from citizens so power can be concentrated in the state? How presumptuous is it for humans to advance a method that God—the only One qualified for the job—rejected from the beginning?

Christians and some others who are concerned about returning America to its founding principles are rediscovering the biblical basis for freedom and economic strength and opportunity. This makes Godonomics a crucial study for us as we move deeper into uncertain times with ongoing economic challenges that none of us have faced before.

Godonomics is the power of God's wisdom applied to a personal, family, and even national economy. It is the blueprint and framework for achieving and enjoying liberty, prosperity, and generosity. And frankly, Godonomics is something that used to be called common sense.

To help us begin our exploration of economic systems, as well as personal and family finance, let's look back to the eighteenth century and a philosopher who had keen insight into God's wisdom as applied to capitalism.



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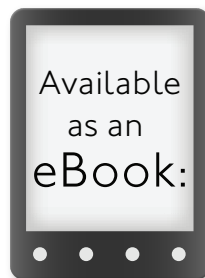
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