

Possessions and the Christian Life in Luke-Acts

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January is a good time to look back over the previous year. As I do that, I realize that one of the growing edges in my stewardship journey has been the importance of making the connection between faith and finances. I had several conversations in 2011 with people who not only hadn't made this connection, but saw no reason to think they should. One person summarized the others when he said to me, "I don't look to my faith or my church for help with my financial decisions."

Eric Barreto's article, in the *Word & World* Rethinking Stewardship supplement, offers us a couple of very helpful insights as we strive to make the important faith and finances connection in our own lives, and to help others make this connection as well.

First is his great quote, "Our 'stuff' has become our 'stuffing.' It gives us and our lives shape and sustains us in a way that Luke would have trouble recognizing." (p. 66) We live in a culture where what we have often defines who we are. Much of the advertising that fills our space seeks to convince us that having this or that product will not only make us happy, but will also enable us to become the kind of person we really want to be.

How can we engage the obvious conflict between this attitude and the claims of the gospel? How can we reflect on this conflict in our own lives? How can we, as Christian leaders, help others consider their own financial lives and self-understanding in light of their faith? I have found great value in naming the issue and engaging in conversation about it. Many faithful Christians have simply not thought about the conflict. Doing so can bring eye-opening insights.

Second, is Barreto's pointing to the corporate dimension of the financial decisions we make. He says it this way, "Social connectedness was a vital component of an individual's status in the ancient world; thus, wealth for Luke entails not only the 'balance in your checkbook' but how that balance enhances or impairs your ability to be in community with your neighbors." (p. 66)

Again, the contrast between this claim and the attitudes of our society is striking. We claim that our financial lives are our own business and that our financial decisions affect only "me and mine." How fruitful it would be for a group of God's people to discuss how it is that our financial decisions impact the congregation and community in which we live.

My growing awareness in 2011 was the importance of making the faith and finances connection in my own life, and the importance of helping people consider this connection in their lives. "Possessions and the Christian Life in Luke-Acts" is a very helpful tool in this endeavor. I expect 2012 to be a year in which I continue on this journey of discovery. I commend the journey to you.