

Fiscal Cliff: How Christians Benefit

We may be on the brink of one of the greatest evangelistic opportunities of all time. We know from Jesus' words that people are waiting to be gathered into the harvest of God's kingdom—the fields are truly “white for harvest” (John 4:35). So while conditions are shaping up to produce a perfect storm of problems, believers have an unprecedented opportunity to represent the Lord of the harvest to those seeking His kingdom.

You've seen the headlines replete with the news, analysis and projections of economic stress in the world's financial systems. Both liberal and conservative government officials, economists, investment bankers and politicians unanimously agree that the world's economic system cannot continue “business as usual” without dramatic aid, assistance, reform or restructuring.

One doesn't have to look much farther than the financial situation of world governments, including the United States, which is 100 percent in debt in ratio to its gross domestic product (GDP), approaching 50 percent of the population receiving their primary source of income from the government, and less than 50 percent of the population paying federal income tax. In addition to this, the world is running a deficit in excess of 10 percent of world GDP (the U.S. is at 14 percent of U.S. GDP).

These numbers are unsustainable. Greece has hit its debt wall. Spain and Italy are facing their own debt walls, as is France. Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair recently stated that if Europe did not change its entitlement mentality, it would not survive. (For articles explaining in plain English what a debt wall is and why we must restructure the world economic

system, visit and search for the “Catch 22” series.)

There is no easy way out of the situation. We cannot tax our way out, spend our way out, borrow our way out, print our way out or grow our way out. We have to deal with the debt and the deficits by restructuring government programs and the services they provide. This will not happen without some pain and sacrifice. The longer we deny reality, the greater the pain and sacrifice.

So enough lamenting—you’ve heard this before. As citizens, what can we do about the situation when we seemingly have no control? Politicians are in gridlock. No one is telling the whole truth. And no one wants to call for joint sacrifice. So what do we do?

It’s time for believers to provide our own solutions and become part of the answer to the problem. The church should be seen as a light, a provider of hope and a leader in the transition to a new, stable economic system.

I would suggest taking a world Christian biblical point of view: Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness (see Matt. 6:33 and Luke 12:31).

Early Church Economy

For a solid model, we can examine what the New Testament churches of the early centuries did to seek God’s kingdom first amid living in a secular world. According to Bruce Shelley, author of *Church History in Plain Language*, the Roman emperor Julian the Apostate “wanted to set aside Christianity and bring back the ancient faith [of pagan worship], but he saw clearly the drawing power of Christian love in practice.”

Julian is quoted as saying: “Atheism [his term for the Christian faith] has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers, and through their care for the burial of the dead. It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew [meaning Christian] who is a beggar, and that the

godless Galileans care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them.”

Shelley argues that one of the reasons for the spread of the church throughout the Roman Empire was the “practical expression of Christian love.” The early Christians did not rely upon the government for anything—after all, they were being persecuted by it. Yet they took care of themselves and others who needed help, and they set no qualifications or criteria for whom they helped. It was one of the most successful periods of evangelism in Christian history.

Yet another opportunity—and in many places, increased persecution—may be coming that allows us to show the love of Christ and enhance the harvest. Europe is in recession. China is not meeting its economic benchmarks of growth. The U.S. is not in a position, primarily because of its debt, to lead the world out of this recession.

Some economists predict that by October European banks will be in need of substantial relief. Depending upon the extent of the bailout required, this could in fact impact the American economy.

In the opinion of Alan Greenspan, former chairman of the Federal Reserve, Europe is the big question mark in our ability to recover. Milton Friedman, the noted economist with whom I once worked with during the Reagan administration, once said to me, “If the king in the middle ages—who controlled all land, all rent, all wages, had slaves, could print money and whose word was law—could not print and borrow his way out of trouble, what makes you think that government can do it today?”

This has happened before. It happened to Rome in the third and fourth centuries. The lack of proper response by the Roman government was a major element in the fall of the Roman

Empire. Great Britain went through a government and economic restructuring in the late 19th and early 20th century at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution.

We have learned these lessons before. And we are in absolute denial to think that there is any easy way out of this situation

Our Plan Ahead

Though this global problem has happened on our clock, so can the solution. It is time to prepare for the role that each of us can play, knowing that we are facing an impending crisis.

The Titanic was called an unsinkable ship. Yet when enough compartments were breached under the water line, the chief engineer responded to the captain: "She's made of iron, sir. I assure you she will sink." There was not a proper plan for evacuation of the passengers. Tragically, more than 1,500 people died because of this lack of planning.

The world will face economic restructuring—it's inevitable. It is yet to be determined how painful the process will be. More natural disasters may occur. Or there could be a terrorist attack again on our soil. Yet undoubtedly, people will be in need. And as Christians, we must be prepared to help all. Paul was clear in his admonition to the people of the church in Rome: "I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks" (Rom. 1:14, NIV).

Rick Joyner of MorningStar Ministries is a national emergency preparedness trainer and certified responder. He and his teams were some of the first responders to the Hurricane Katrina disaster. His observations were that the first two weeks were chaos. People literally took the law into their own hands. The second two weeks, Marshall Law set in and the federal government and National Guard established order. The third two weeks, civic operations and charitable organizations—along with the federal and state governments—established a system

for providing basic services and order was sustained.

I believe this can be an example to us for what to expect and how to respond when there is a breakdown in distribution of basic supplies and services.

Many churches are prepared to help and have done so locally. Christians have responded by providing aid to areas of fire, flood, earthquakes and other natural disasters. Many have volunteered their time and talents. In fact, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, so much charitable aid came at one point that it was difficult to organize and distribute the aid packages. A better plan of organization is needed.

If a major national disaster occurred that impacted several states, a large region or the entire country, a national network plan, locally implemented, could not only be beneficial but critical.

No one knows what the transition to restructured government services will look like. It may be dramatic in its impact or it may be a slow, downward-spiraling process. But the reality of economic reconciliation is coming. Christians must be prepared to help. In doing so, the harvest will be enhanced. By sacrificing for others, sharing and providing basic needs and services, we will demonstrate Christ's love. In showing love for others, our evangelical purpose is fulfilled.

A person's responsibility is first to his family, then to the body of Christ, then to all fellow brothers and sisters, and last, himself. If every church in America prepared its members to take care of themselves and one other non-church member per church member for six weeks, the entire U.S. population would be covered for critical needs. I'm not suggesting that churches spend money or stock up on supplies. I am suggesting that churches have a plan to prepare for a harvest that could be at hand.

Most Americans have enough food in their cupboards to survive

for a couple of weeks. We are a blessed nation in abundance. If each church had a plan simply to coordinate all the cupboards within its congregation, those in the church would be surprised at how much food they already have. And if society saw churches as islands of refuge, places to go for help and advice, then the first two weeks would not have to result in people taking the law into their own hands.

All states have emergency *preparedness* plans, but few states have actual *statewide* emergency plans. If church leaders were prepared for any crisis and informed the local sheriff or police of their willingness to help when a crisis developed, then they would be easily included in the process of creating coordinated plans. For example, I know of churches in Oklahoma and Alaska that have successfully begun this process of coordinated planning with local governments.

Where Do We Go From Here?

The necessity of economic restructuring will result in one of two scenarios: either 1) more federal government control, less states' rights and reduced individual freedom as the federal government provides basic services; or 2) state governments and local municipalities will provide basic services and the result will be more local control, increased states' rights and a proper balance between federal and state governments. Christian aid, for the right reasons, could help tremendously in the latter result.

So again, what does it mean to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness? To me it means trusting God and His rules for order. It means believing He will act upon your prayers. It means loving your neighbor as yourself. It means believing that His kingdom is the answer rather than total government control. It means spreading the "Good News."

Righteousness is doing the right thing, pursuant to God's laws and commands, and obeying His directives. If we do this for God's glory, we set the example for the sacrifice that is

required to right the order.

Remember, Jesus told us we are not to worry or be anxious about what we eat, what we drink, what we wear—"your Father knows that you need these things" (Luke 12:30, NKJV). At the same time, just because we are not to do this in fear or worry does not mean that it would not be prudent to prepare.

In Acts 11:28 Agabus predicted famine. It actually happened. Scripture says, "The disciples, *each according to his ability*, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea" (v. 29, emphasis mine).

The exercise of faith, knowing that God is in charge of all circumstances and that He will provide for us and for others through us, is our obedience to God's Word.

In Jeremiah 22:15-16, God offers the following statement about King Josiah: "He did what was right and just, so all went well with him. He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?" (NIV).

Many churches today provide for the needs of the poor as best they can. it's not easy, given the countless requests made. Pastors have to determine the legitimacy of the requests for help and prioritization of resources. But that's not the point—the main issue is whether we are prepared to help at all.

A time is coming when the need will be great. Just as in the time of Agabus, when a greater need was predicted, a plan of organization and coordination was required. The early church assigned the task and organization to the elders. Possibly we could do the same today. There are elected officials who would help with the implementation of Christian services to overall government plans.

However you balance the Scriptures on providing for the needy, a believer's obligation is to share the good news of Jesus

Christ for the Kingdom. An opportunity is coming for a great harvest and awakening, and we must be ready.

In these times, will we as Christians be known as a movement of servants who gave hope and comfort in time of need? Will historians, centuries from now, refer to Christians as having provided a solution to a world of peoples' needs?

May we prepare to set the example of love, be obedient to our call and seize the coming opportunity for the harvest.

Marc Nuttle is an attorney based in Norman, Okla., who represents corporations, business projects and political entities nationally and internationally. He is widely recognized for his expertise in forecasting political and economic trends and served on the Industrial Policy Advisory Committee for Trade and Policy Matters for the U.S. government under President Ronald Reagan.