

Book Review
by Yvonne S. Smith

**Neither Poverty nor Riches:
A Biblical Theology of
Material Possessions**

Craig L. Blomberg. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999.

At last! A balanced, thorough, readable, biblical exposition on the subject of wealth and material possessions! In my classes, questions about how Christians should deal with possessions and wealth come up continuously. Students and I wrestle with issues of economic justice, wealth as a mark of God's favor, greed, and poverty. As a young person, I struggled to find a scriptural response to these issues, and my students do, too. While helpful, Sider, Schneider, Nash, Compolo, and Novak all have strong left or right biases. Getz tends to deal with individual actions more effectively than the thorny issues of systemic evil and injustice. After reading these books, the question still remains: how does Scripture say God's people, individually and collectively, should deal with economic questions?

What Blomberg contributes to this discussion is scriptural thoroughness, historic background, and balance. Section by section, he goes through the

Bible and the intertestamental period and outlines what God says about wealth in all its nuances and complexities. He even connects the sections together, showing, for example, how principles from the Old Testament might or might not be valid for the church. Remarkably, he does it all in a short 253 pages.

Not only does Blomberg discuss each section of biblical literature carefully—he places the teachings on wealth and possessions into historical context. For example, when examining the Law and Wisdom literature, he notes that God's provision of material blessings as good gifts is part of the patriarchal covenant and God's plan to give His people a special land. Blomberg also notes the corresponding stress against unjust business practices, coveting, exploiting the poor, and putting one's trust in wealth instead of God. He emphasizes the constant reminders throughout the Old Testament that the possessions of the Israelites ultimately belonged to the Lord and were held by them in stewardship.

But possibly Blomberg's most important contribution is to show the harmonies and disharmonies between the Old

and New Testaments—specifically Christ as the fulfillment of the Law. “No command issued to the Old Testament followers of Yahweh necessarily carries over into the Christian era unchanged,” he says, “but every command reflects principles at some level that are binding on Christians” (p. 39). The subsequent development of that statement is done with care and attention to historicity and context. He also explores the harmonies and the disharmonies between Jesus' and Paul's teachings about material things. The last chapter summarizes the book and draws personal conclusions for Christian living. Even here, Blomberg speaks carefully, understanding the multiple complexities involved, understanding that the bottom line is always one's attitude toward others and toward God.

This is not a comfortable book. However much I appreciate it, it does not leave unquestioned either my left or right bias. It does not salve my conscious for spending too much on family gifts last Christmas. It does not let me comfortably exploit the immigrant gentleman who wants to mow my lawn. Neither does it condemn me for driving a nice

car. It does, however, point me continuously to God and what God says about material possessions. It clearly discusses the complexities and tensions involved. It shows how God has historically expected his people to respond to wealth and possessions. It gives me a basis upon which to build equity and wisdom in this, one of the most difficult questions facing Western Christians.

The book is scholarly enough that the average undergraduate will not find it “easy reading.” But for serious students or graduate students wanting to understand a proper attitude towards possessions, it will be a gold mine. I recommend it highly.

Yvonne Smith