

The Bible Against Socialism and Communism

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Karl Marx defined socialism as the step between *capitalism* and *communism*. Under socialism, all property and means of production are owned and controlled by the society (the community). Of course, without free-market forces balancing supply and demand, some person or group of people must eventually plan the economy. This opens the door to the *central planning* of communistic or other totalitarian forms of government. For central planning to work, all members of the collective must allow the planners to make all decisions about what is to be produced, grown and manufactured. Planners must also be allowed to decide *how much* of each item is produced. In the past, miscalculations, ineptitude, inefficiency and indifference on the part of the planners has resulted in the starvation deaths of millions of people. It should also be noted that socialism empowers the ruling class to direct state-sponsored violence and persecution against potential threats to the system. History contains many examples of such persecution being directed against people on the basis of political, ethnic and religious differences. Along with the millions who have starved to death because of socialistic policies, millions of others have been deliberately slaughtered.

Regardless of this history, there are those in every generation who idealistically believe in the concept of socialism. Their utopian dream hinders them from accepting the logical development of socialism into communism. Marx, Engels and others understood the inevitability of this transition quite well, and history contains many tragic examples of its effects. Since the writings of Marx and Engels, many nations have experimented with various forms of socialism and everywhere it has been tried it has failed. Oddly, however, even with this history there are still plenty of people and nations who are willing to try it again. Blind personal pride leads some people to believe that socialism will work if only *they* are the ones *doing it*. They reason that socialism has failed in the past only because the wrong people have tried it. Such idealists ignore the fact that the very concept of socialism is inherently flawed and contrary to God's economic model. God ordained the function of government (Romans 13:3-4; 1 Timothy 2:2; 1 Peter 2:14). He did not ordain food production or economic control as a part of that function. (*For a more detailed treatment of this subject, see my article, "What God Ordained With Respect To Civil Government."*)

Why Use The Bible To Refute Socialism?

Some might wonder why I would approach this subject from a biblical perspective. Socialism is usually refuted on a purely secular and logical basis. The only "moral" component to such secular arguments is that *a man is entitled*

to the fruits of his labor. It is my belief that this moral argument is actually best made by the Bible, and that regardless of one's view of Bible inspiration, its simple observations on this subject are compelling and its logic is irrefutable. Because of its emphasis on personal responsibility, the Bible has much to say about work and economy. Even those who reject the *verbal inspiration* of the Scriptures can still appreciate its pragmatic treatment of basic human responsibilities and interaction.

Another reason to use the Bible in this refutation is to answer those who *misuse* the Bible in their effort to defend socialism and communism. Given the connection between *atheism* and *socialism*, and the disdain that Marxists generally have for religion, I am surprised to see how much effort they exert in trying to prove that the Bible supports socialism. Certain verses from Acts chapters 2 and 4 are regularly cited by socialists, though as we shall see, they disregard the context of those chapters and ignore the peculiar circumstances. Barack Obama recently cited part of Luke 12:48 in an effort to defend the practice of income redistribution. Jesus said in this verse, "*...for everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required...*" Though it has absolutely nothing at all to do with *government* action of collecting and reallocating personal income, President Obama and others cite the passage in an effort to defend redistributionist policies. Another man recently cited Matthew 5:40 as proof that Jesus favored a 100% income tax. Jesus said, "*If any man wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.*" The socialist's poor interpretive skills are rivaled only by his lack of mathematical skills. For his application of the passage to be correct, he needs the government to be the plaintiff (*though Jesus said he was "a man"*), and needs the defendant to possess only his shirt and coat and nothing else. (*Did the man not have sandals or even a sash?*) Socialists obviously don't make good Bible scholars. Of course, they aren't sincere in their approach to the Bible. A genuine socialist will say and do whatever is necessary to protect and advance the collective. To him there is no "right" or "wrong" - there is merely the progress of the state.

Inherent Flaws Of Socialism

1. **Socialism Results In Loss Of Personal Liberty:** In the absence of supply-and-demand, the economy must be controlled by some person or group of people. In order to control the economy this person or group must control the laborers (the people). Thus, the loss of a free-market economy is linked inexorably to the loss of personal liberty. There are logical reasons why communist states do not permit freedom of expression or freedom of movement. Tyrants know that when freedoms are allowed in small areas (thought, artistic expression, speech and movement), then people will desire

freedom in larger, more important areas (religious expression, family size, type of occupation, work schedule, place and type of residence...etc). In a planned economy/society these decisions are made by the planners of the ruling class. A controlled economy can function properly only if people are *where they are told to be, doing what they are told to do*. Any deviation from this arrangement has the potential to disrupt the health and harmony of the society, even to the point of jeopardizing its very existence. Members of the collective must cede their liberties to the collective in order for the system to function properly.

James 4:13 illustrates the total *freedom* of the divine model of economy. The man of this scenario chooses the *place* where he wishes to do business (goes into "*such and such a town*"). He decides *how long* he will stay there ("*spend a year there*"). He chooses the *type of work* that he will do ("*buy and sell*"), and he "*makes a profit*" as a result of his own *personal business decisions*. Socialism does not allow for such choices by the individual, and it literally *despises* the "profit" making that is discussed in this passage. Even the less extreme *democratic socialism* that the US is now toying with is antagonistic to *profit-making*. To the socialist, all "profit-making" is "obscene" and "immoral."

While at Philippi, Paul met certain women at the riverside where they assembled for prayer. Among these women was a woman from Thyatira named Lydia. She, along with her family was visiting Philippi. Luke describes her as "*a seller of purple goods*" (Acts 16:14). Lydia was a business-woman who had obviously travelled from Thyatira to Philippi in search of another or better market for her product. *Freedom of movement* allowed Lydia to expand her business. Socialism restricts movement, and is thus contrary to these Bible examples. Along with *religious freedom*, Lydia enjoyed *economic freedom*. These freedoms provide the ideal environment for humans to lead the "*quiet and peaceful*" lives that God would have them to live (1 Timothy 2:2).

In His parable of the great pearl, Jesus described a merchant, "*who upon finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it*" (Matthew 13:45-46). This is an example of free-market capitalism. The merchant made his own economic decision based upon his own comparative evaluation of the items involved. He estimated the value of the "great pearl" to be high enough to justify his selling everything else that he owned in order to buy it. Socialism does not allow individuals such power of economic choice. As we shall see, socialism violates personal free-agency. In the above examples, each person made his own decision about where and how he would conduct his business. Socialist-styled *planned economies* do not grant

people such liberties.

The pie-in-the-sky utopian may love the notion of being supported by the collective, but he fails to consider the cost to him in the loss of personal liberties. Many socialist-leaning youths enjoy their smart phones, tablets, X-Boxes, Play Stations and televisions. I wonder if they have stopped to consider just how such devices might be viewed by authoritarian leaders? Is it possible that totalitarian central-planners might view such devices as *a waste of time* and *threat to society*? Might they consider that the time that youths spend playing computer games might be better spent in work and production? History answers my questions with a resounding yes - that is precisely what they would think. Even books were banished under Hitler's national socialism, under the fear that certain writings might inspire free thought. Collectivist economic models may sound good, but only in theory. In reality they rob people of their personal liberties.

2. **Socialism Is Contrary To Free Agency:** Socialism is antithetical to the very nature of both God and man. By creating man in His own image (Genesis 1:26-27), God created man with perfect *free-agency* - the power to choose. Religious people often speak of free "moral" agency, but "moral" choices aren't the only choices that free agency allows. We also make many other choices; from the mate that we choose and the jobs that we do, to the type of clothing that we wear and vehicles that we drive. Native free-agency is not just "a religious thing." It is that quality of human nature that identifies him and allows him to distinguish himself from all others. It causes him to crave and appreciate freedom in all facets of life. It is individuality. Free agency is one of our greatest gifts from God. Socialists hate the notion of "rugged individualism," for it emphasizes the strength of the individual over the collective. Under socialism and communism, personal freedom is sacrificed for the "greater good" of government and society. Human free-agency is over-ruled by the needs of the collective. In the words of the "Spock" character in one of the Star Trek movies, in collectivism, "the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few."
3. **Socialism Is Dispiriting:** The divine model of economy is designed upon man's innate free agency. Each man is personally responsible for his own livelihood and that of his family. This need for him to provide for himself and his family provides a strong personal incentive for him to work and succeed. If one wishes to eat, then he must work (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Adam was told that he would produce food from the ground through painful exertion - "*in pain you shall eat of it... in the sweat of your face you shall eat bread...*" (Genesis 3:17, 19). The slothful man acquires nothing (Proverbs 13:4). The diligent man

is rewarded (Proverbs 12:24; Ephesians 4:28). **Socialism is contrary to God's design, for under socialism the slothful man is rewarded like the diligent man.** Each one receives his livelihood from the collective. There is no advantage or benefit to working harder than anyone else, for the reward is the same either way. I remember several years ago, going with my brothers to look at a Russian-made Belarus tractor. I commented to them that the axle housing and other parts were very roughly finished. My middle brother responded, "*What do you expect: It was built by a bunch of drunk Russians!*" Some time after that, I read a news report about the utter hopelessness of Russian workers, and how large numbers of them drowned their despair in Vodka every night. Government programs had to be formed to discourage so much alcohol consumption! Socialism breeds apathy and despair, and ironically, these are conditions that socialism cannot itself repair.

The redistributionist policies of *democratic socialism* are just as spirit-crushing as those of full-blown socialism. The entrepreneurial spirit is extinguished through excessive regulation and taxation. Under redistributionism, money must be increasingly confiscated from producers in order to satisfy the needs and wants of the non-producers. Oftentimes politically fueled, this policy leads to class warfare, essentially dividing the population into the classes of *makers* and *takers*. The makers begin to resent that the fruits of their long hours and extra effort are forcibly taken and given to those who put forth little or no effort. The takers resent the fact that the makers possess the things that they do. It is a recipe for social disaster.

If the simple biblical principles of taxation were followed, this class divide would be greatly reduced. Sure, there will always be people who are jealous, envious and covetous, but there would be no *government* framework for encouraging and accommodating their sinful attitudes. Under the biblical model of taxation, taxes are paid in order to provide civil authorities with the ability to *punish those who do evil* and to *protect those who do good* (Romans 13:3-7; 1 Peter 2:14). Under the divine model, taxpayers pay for whatever services fit within this divinely authorized framework. A criminal justice system, a standing military force, various levels and types of law enforcement and fire and emergency services are just a few things that come to my mind when considering these categories. The basic God-ordained functions of government are a service to every citizen, thus every citizen should pay some amount of tax (Romans 13:6-7). Class warfare would be greatly minimized if all citizens paid at least some tax, for all would have a personal interest in how their money was being used.

4. **Socialism Ignores Differences In Work Ethic:** Different people have different work ethics. Experience and observation tell us that some people work *harder* than other people. Some people work *smarter* than other people, and some people work *longer* than other people. Paul and his companions “*labored and toiled night and day*” that they might not be burdensome to anyone (1 Thessalonians 2:9). Contrariwise, the Bible describes some as being “slothful” and “sluggards.” The sluggard is one who *sleeps too much* (Proverbs 6:9). As a door turns upon its hinges, so the *slothful* man turns upon his bed (Proverbs 26:14). He refuses to work (Proverbs 21:25), and especially under any conditions that he deems to be too *harsh* (Proverbs 20:4 - “*will not plow in the Autumn*”). He makes any possible excuse for not meeting his responsibilities, even exaggerating and imagining potential obstacles - “*there is a lion in the street, I shall be slain*” (Proverbs 22:13; 26:13). He is *undependable* and *unreliable* (Proverbs 10:26). He is so lazy that he will not even roast his game after it is caught (Proverbs 12:27). Consequently, he “*has nothing*” (Proverbs 13:4). First century Cretans had the reputation of being “*lazy gluttons*” (Titus 1:12).

In His parable of the talents, Jesus describes an investor dispersing various weights (amounts) of money to 3 different men according to their ability. One man was given 5 talents, another was given 2, and another was given 1. The 5 and 2 talent men each doubled their master’s investment, but the 1 talent man hid his money and made no increase. Upon his return, the investor commended the 5 and 2 talent men, but he condemned the 1 talent man for his *slothfulness*. The 1 talent man was to be cast out into outer darkness where he would experience “*weeping and grinding of teeth*” (Matthew 25:14-30). Under socialistic models of economy, the 1 talent man would have been given equal share with the 5 and 2 talent men. This is not so under Christ’s model. Under His model of economy, each person profits according to his own level of work and commitment.

5. **Socialism Rewards Irresponsibility:** The more that people and societies drift away from the mores of a biblical and traditional worldview, the less personally responsible they are and the more dependent upon others they become. Rather than “*working with their own hands*” (1 Thessalonians 4:11), “*eating their own food*” (2 Thessalonians 3:12) and “*being dependent upon no one*” (1 Thessalonians 4:12), such people look to others for their sustenance. Far too many able-bodied and sound-minded people turn to family members (usually parents), churches, charitable organizations or government agencies for their livelihood. This has a debilitating effect upon societies, leading to their eventual demise. The apostle Paul told the Thessalonians that any man who

refuses to work should not eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10). *{Please note that I am discussing the duties of capable individuals, not of those who are incapable. People can become debilitated, either physically or mentally, and therefore be unable to support themselves. They can also be the victims of a bad economy or of detrimental government policies, such as over-regulation and excessive taxation, which stifle free enterprise and destroy opportunity. It is right and good for the capable to help the disabled, the sick and the infirm. The focus of this article is upon those who do have ability and opportunity, but seek to evade that responsibility.}*

The notion of “sharing” certainly sounds good, and the Bible teaches us to share with those who have need, but the forced “sharing” of collectivism is not taught in the Bible. In contrasting love that is “*in word and talk*” with love that is “*in deed and truth*,” John wrote, “*But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, but closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?*” (1 John 3:17-18). Clearly, a part of loving one’s brother or neighbor is helping him physically when he needs such help. This is well demonstrated in the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). However, the “sharing” of collectivism is not the kind-hearted caring and sharing of the good Samaritan. Even if started with the best of intentions, collectivism rapidly degenerates into totalitarianism, for someone (usually a charismatic leader or particular political party) will soon emerge to make decisions for the collective. This usually ends with the deaths of thousands to millions of innocent people.

Paul’s Three Classifications: Ephesians 4:28

The apostle Paul told the Ephesians,

“Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.”

Paul identifies three classifications of people with respect to supply of needs:

1. The thief, who wrongly satisfies his need by taking from others.
2. The laborer, who rightly satisfies his need through his own honest labor.
3. The legitimately needy person, whose condition authorizes him to take from others. *(Note: One might become “needy” as a result of his own laziness and foolishness. Paul told the Thessalonians that if one is unwilling to work, then neither should he eat - 2 Thessalonians 3:10. Unlike the slacker of this passage, the needy person of Ephesians 4:28 was obviously worthy to receive assistance from others.)*

1. Types of Thievery

When one thinks of a “thief” he usually thinks of one who breaks into someone’s house or place of business and steals items that he can either use for himself or sell for cash. The thief may be the sneaky, non-violent “cat” burglar type, who poses no personal physical threat to property owners. The Bible says, “*People do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy himself when he is starving*” (Proverbs 6:30). This passage does not condone theft, but it does show that some thieves are different than others. It depicts an extenuating circumstance that might be taken into consideration when rendering legal judgment or administering punishment. This type of thief is certainly different from the dangerous armed-invader who has no respect for human life and will harm or kill his victims in an act of theft. While the word “thief” may suggest these ordinary types of thieves, there are other kinds of thievery that we should be concerned about.

The 8th Mosaic Commandment was, “*You shall not steal*” (Exodus 20:15; Romans 13:9). This commandment presupposes the right of personal property ownership. (***There could be no “theft” if not for the right of personal property possession.***) This same observation can be made about Paul’s words in Ephesians 4:28. One is to work with his hands what is good so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Notice that the worker “*has something.*” The fruits of his labor are his own possession to either use for himself or give to others.

Theft is wrong because one’s possessions, whether acquired by gift or by labor, are his own property. The thief believes that he is somehow entitled to the possessions, wealth and income of others, so he takes it. Under collectivist systems like socialism and communism, the God-given right of personal property ownership is rejected. All means of production and all produce are owned and controlled by the collective (community leaders or central government). The state (or collective) confiscates all personal wealth and it redistributes the wealth as it sees fit. **Socialistic and communistic systems of economy are based upon theft.** As such, they are anti-God and contrary to the divinely revealed model of economy. The idealist may argue that this is not necessarily the case, and that a socialistic economy could be formed upon mutual agreement by the members of the society. However, as explained before, both history and logic prove such to be impossible, at least for a sustained period of time, for the “mutual sharing” of the dreamer’s collective soon transitions to the planned economy of rank and ruthless socialism.

Some people deny being socialists, yet they support the practice of *income redistribution*. During the 2008 presidential campaign, Barack Obama notoriously

told Joe the plumber that it is good “to spread the wealth around.” In context, he meant that he thought it was good to take money from one group of people and give it to another. However, like socialism, the doctrine and practice of income redistribution is based upon *theft*. Some entity (usually government) confiscates wealth from one group of people and distributes it to another group. Their goal is to achieve parity. This process is known in modern terms as “social justice.” *(An observation about labels: The apparent sinfulness of a thing is often concealed by calling it by another name. While it may be “social,” there is nothing “just” about tyrants or governments stealing money from one person in order to give it to another person. As the commentator/economist Walter E. Williams so well explains, one will be charged with theft if he forcibly takes money from a person, even if his intent is to give the stolen money to another less fortunate person. Yet, governments do this all of the time! They take money from one person and give it to another person. I should point out that, like Barack Obama, Walter Williams is a black man. Their color makes no difference to me, but it might make a difference to others who might assume me to be “racist” for criticizing President Obama’s social ideology.)*

2. The Value of Labor

As seen from the above passages, it is God’s will for men to work to provide for themselves and for others:

“But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8).

This is an interesting statement in view of the spiritual consequences of unbelief: Mark 16:16 and 2 Thessalonians 2:12 both say that people will be “damned” for unbelief. Paul’s point is obvious: The refusal to support one’s family is as wrong as unbelief. Even infidels support their families. One cannot retain his character as a Christian while refusing to support his family.

We earlier saw from Ephesians 4:28 that one is to work so that he can provide for his own needs and for the needs of others. Paul was himself an example in this regard:

“You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me” (Acts 20:34)

“For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day that we might not be a burden to any of you...” (1 Thessalonians 2:9).

What an amazing contrast to so many millions of people in North America, France, Greece and elsewhere! I recently heard that the US now has over 100 million people on some type of government welfare. Notice that not only did Paul and his companions *work* - but they worked *hard, long hours*. We are reminded of the parable of the vineyard laborers in Matthew 20:1-16. We know that the workday consisted of 12 hours, for those hired in the eleventh hour worked one hour (11 + 1 = 12). We also know that the Jewish work-week consisted of 6 days (Exodus 20:9). Thus they worked six 12-hour days. Many people in this country complain if they have to work any more than 40 hours per week. This begs the question: *Who invented the concept of a 40-hour work-week?* It certainly isn't a *biblical* concept! Sadly, North American youths have been literally brainwashed into this concept. Some simply refuse to work any more than forty hours per week. Listening to some of them, you would think that they had received some type of divine exemption from working more than the magical *forty hours* per week! Some European countries have standard work-weeks of 35 hours or less. Not surprisingly, these very countries are now bankrupt and are facing terrible social unrest from their spoiled work forces. Such people complain and protest, yet their work-week is one half of the standard Jewish work-week under the Mosaic economy. Those who complain about "how rich those Jews are" might want to consider their work ethic before making judgmental statements against them.

The "privileged" mentality and cultural laziness is not a new development. The apostle Paul quoted a Cretan prophet as saying, "*Cretans are always liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons.*" Paul confirmed the accuracy of the prophet's statement, saying, "*This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith*" (Titus 1:12-13). The condition in first century Crete demonstrates how a lack of personal responsibility can become culturally engrained. The dependency mentality becomes generational. Each new generation learns laziness and irresponsibility from the previous generation. The condition is self-perpetuating so long as there is government or others who are willing to subsidize this lifestyle. Sadly, ethnicity and race considerations make it taboo to criticize the welfare culture. This makes the condition virtually impossible to change.

The Fruits of One's Labor

Adam was to produce his food in "pain" and "sweat" (Genesis 3:17-19). Paul and the vineyard workers worked long, hard hours. There was, however, the sweet satisfaction that the fruits of their labor were their own to use, share and enjoy. Though he did warn against the vain toil of mere material acquisition, Solomon did teach that one should take *joy* and *pleasure* in his toil (Ecclesiastes 2:24;

3:13, 22). That is, he should *“eat and drink and enjoy the fruits of his labor.”* Solomon said these fruits were *“man’s lot”* and *“God’s gift to man”* (Ecclesiastes 3:22, 13). **Socialism robs man of this God-given gift** - it takes the fruits of one man’s labor and disperses them to other men. As stated before, this constitutes theft.

As seen from the examples of Adam, Paul and others, the food that they produced and the money that they earned was their own to use as they saw fit. This is well demonstrated in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). This married couple sold a piece of property and gave part of the proceeds to the church (Acts 5:1, 2). Tragically, they represented themselves as having given *all* of the proceeds when in fact they had given only *part*. They committed no sin by giving only part of the proceeds, nor did they sin by owning or selling property. Their sin was that of *lying*. They lied about the amount [percentage] of money that they had given to the church. Peter told Ananias, *“While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God”* (Acts 5:4).

Of course, the primary purpose of this story is to show that God condemns lying and misrepresentation. However, the lesson is also taught that God grants humans the right to own and control property. Under collectivism, all property, means of production, all produce and income are owned by the collective. The individual *cedes control of his life, liberty and property to the leaders of the collective* (usually some tyrant or tyrannical political party or board) and they assume responsibility over the people. Neither socialism nor communism fit the divine model of personal rights and responsibility. Socialism actually breeds irresponsibility. It never encourages personal initiative, ambition or productivity.

3. Helping The Needy

Under collectivist models of economy, the directors of the collective decide how the money is spent. Karl Marx’s slogan was, *“From each according to his ability, to each according to his need.”* This always sounds great in theory, but in order for it to be implemented some person or group of people must define the classes (“able” versus “needy”) and decide the parameters of (re)distribution. Currently in the US, a family of 4 is considered impoverished if it has an annual income of \$23,000.00 or less. Millions of “impoverished” people in the United States have adequate housing, never go hungry, own at least one automobile and at least one flat screen television, and have cable or satellite TV. Obviously, the expression “poverty level” is a relative term. “Impoverished” people of other countries don’t do quite so well.

Under the policies of democratic socialism (which the US is rapidly advancing towards), those under the “poverty level” are subsidized by the fruits of other people’s labor. The collective takes from one class and gives to another. This is accomplished through a graduated tax code, which in the US has resulted in the top 50% of federal taxpayers paying 98% of the taxes. The top 10% pays 70% of all federal taxes, and the top 1% pays a whopping 37% of all federal taxes! Through burdensome taxation, the government redistributes money from the wealthier class to the poorer class through a variety of government assistance and welfare programs. The term “government assistance” is far more accurate than one might initially think, for a large part of the “assistance” goes to “government” workers. Multiple layers of bureaucracy siphon off billions of the tax dollars that are taken from the producers and given to non-producers.

Under the biblical model of economy, the *individual* decides how much money he will give and to whom he will give it. This brings us full circle back to the principle of free agency. Our giving is an expression of our personal free agency. Ephesians 4:28 says that the laborer *“will have something to give to anyone in need.”* Jesus tells us to *“give to those who ask”* (Matthew 5:42). The good samaritan personally aided the attack victim, even telling the innkeeper *“Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back”* (Luke 10:35). In worship giving, *“Each one is to give as he has prospered... he must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful”* (1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 9:7). As we have opportunity we are to *“do good to all men, especially those who are of the household of faith”* (Galatians 6:10). The “giving” of collectivism violates the free-will principle of giving that is taught in Scripture.

The Sharing Of Acts 2 & 4

Some people claim that the Bible promotes and encourages socialism and even communism. They cite the “sharing” passages of Acts chapters 2 and 4 as evidence of a *communistic* lifestyle. The argument is made primarily from Acts 2:44-45 and Acts 4:32:

Acts 2:44-45 - *“And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.”*

Acts 4:32 - *“Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and one soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him were his own, but they had everything in common.”*

It is alleged from these statements that first century Christians practiced what is called *community of property* - a system in which all property, production and proceeds are ceded to a common pool and distribution is made to each person according to his need. Some have compared these conditions in the early church to the communistic doctrine that was popularized by Karl Marx's slogan, "*From each according to his ability, to each according to his need.*" However, *Marxism* is not what was practiced by first century Christians. Such an interpretation of Acts 2 & 4 disparages the kindness and generosity of 1st century saints, reducing their sacrifice to a mere communal obligation. A Bible story that is intended as an example of good and virtuous acts of free-will giving and love for neighbor is hijacked by liberals who will do anything they can to establish a system of income redistribution. They will happily distort biblical narrative if it means advancing their socialist agenda. Honest Bible students respect *context*, whereas those who are interested only in advancing some ideology will misuse sacred texts in order to advance their godless agendas.

Some Important Observations

1. Acts 2 describes a once-in-history occurrence - the establishment of the Lord's church. This will never happen again. Jewish males had convened in Jerusalem to observe Pentecost, but they found themselves being exposed to the first gospel sermon. Thousands of them obeyed the gospel and continued in Jerusalem (Acts 2:37-ff.). Their extended stay in Jerusalem placed an unusual financial burden upon the Jews who resided in that area. Native Jews sold even their *lands and houses* in order to assist their new brothers (Acts 4:34). The conditions of Acts 2-5 will never again be duplicated, so great care must be taken when interpreting these passages.
2. The proceeds were "*laid at the Apostles' feet*" (Acts 4:35; 5:2). This expression implies a treasury, but not that of a human board or central-planning committee. The money was contributed to the Lord's *church* (Acts 5:11), not to the government. Funds were distributed under the oversight of the *church*, not of an economic planning board.
3. People sold their property in order to assist their *needy* brethren (Acts 2:44,45; 4:32-5:1). The Bible defines a "needy" person as one who lacks *food and clothing*: Paul said, "*But having food and clothing, let us therewith be content*" (1 Timothy 6:8). By helping the "needy," the giver provided food and clothing. The parable of the good Samaritan expands this to include *shelter* and *medical care* (Luke 10:30-35). This aid was provided by the free-will offerings of individual Christians. The decisions were not made by the community or by some government panel or political party. The second and fourth chapters of Acts teach

us lessons about *brotherly love* and *generosity*, not about socialism or communism!

Conclusion

While the concept of “community sharing” sounds like a great idea, socialism and communism are not merely about sharing - they are about *control*. Humans tend to want to control and regulate other humans. This ranges from the simple “control freak” who is intent upon running other people’s lives, to the megalomaniac who seeks to control the world. Socialism seeks to control and regulate the fruits of man’s labor. By controlling the fruits of one’s labor, one controls the laborer. According to the Bible, God grants each human the possession and control of the fruits of his own labor. As free-agents, we can use this wealth in a way that redounds to the glory of God (Matthew 19:21; 2 Corinthians 9:13), or we can use it for our own godless self-pleasure (Luke 12:16-21; 15:13; 16:19-24). Though God allows us to make the choice, He holds us accountable for the decisions we make (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Obviously, socialism would not be so appealing if all one knew of it was that it enabled some people to obtain total control over others. There is another, more deceptive dimension to it: Socialism appeals to man’s desire to be cared for and provided for by someone else. It frightens man to think that he is responsible for his own life and livelihood. Socialism offers him security (though at great costs in personal liberty). The state promises to feed him when he is hungry, clothe and shelter him when he is cold, and cure him when he is sick. The term “nanny-state” has been appropriately applied to this arrangement. As the child takes comfort in the arms of his mother, so the citizen (better, *denizen*) takes comfort in the arms of the state. Herein lies the great and dangerous deception - unlike a child’s mother, the monolithic mechanism of the state lacks the capacity to provide personal care for its “child.” The collective’s real purpose is not to defend and preserve the rights of individuals, but to strengthen and promote itself. Christians must oppose socialism and communism, for these systems of economy and governance are contrary to God’s design of both man, government and economy.

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