

Does the Bible Teach Socialism/Communism?

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In the movie, *Fiddler on the Roof*, set in 1905, a character named Perchik is a Marxist revolutionary. In one scene, he has a conversation with some children about how Laban made Jacob work seven additional years for Rachel. He tells them, "The Bible clearly teaches us you can never trust an employer." The children ask, "And that is what the Bible teaches us?" He replies, "That is the lesson of the story of Jacob, [pause] if you interpret it correctly." This is a great example of how people often find in the Bible exactly what they are looking for to wrongly justify themselves and their beliefs.

Those who support socialism/communism do the same thing leveraging the Bible to undergird their social system. They cite passages such as Acts 2:44-45 and Acts 4:32-37—which teach the virtue of voluntarily helping others—to support governmental legislation to redistribute wealth. A prominent politician has quoted her "favorite verse" many times in support of her efforts to mandate socialism: "To minister to the needs of God's creation is an act of worship. To ignore those needs is to dishonor the God who made us." The only problem is that it isn't in the Bible, but that doesn't stop her from pretending it is and using it and the Bible to advance her political philosophy. Another politician recently tweeted, "Genesis 1: God looked on the world & called it good not once, not twice, but seven times. Genesis 2: God commands all people to 'serve and protect' creation. Leviticus: God mandates that not only the people, but the land that sustains them, shall be respected." She "quotes" these "verses" to support her socialism's radical environmental agenda. Perhaps someone should quote to her God's promise that ensures the ongoing fecundity of the earth in Genesis 8:22, (but why quibble over details)?

Socialism/Communism is a political system based on the assumption that the world is economically divided into two classes: the owners of production vs. the workers/producers; the aristocracy vs. the proletariat; the rich vs. the poor; the "haves" vs. the "have-nots." The object of socialism/communism is to use the power of the government to take away wealth from those who have it and redistribute it to those who do not. It is alleged that this ideology will redress extant social injustices fomented by the privilege the "haves" exercise over the "have-nots." In this way, society's ills will be cured and it will usher in a utopian paradise on earth.

A common assumption is that Jesus supported socialism/communism because of His advocacy of helping the poor. Some also cite the miracle of the loaves and fishes to show how Jesus wanted everyone to have an equal share (Robert Service, *Comrades: A History of World Communism*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2007, 14). However, Jesus never envisioned a world (prior to His advent) in which the poor would not exist. In Mark 14:7, He said, "For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good...." Jesus did not expect the church to redress all the wrongs of society before His return because some wrongs would not be addressed until His return (2 Thess. 1:7-10). Additionally, Jesus made it clear that He was not seeking to establish an earthly kingdom because He said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36). Jesus would not support enforcing His teaching with the sword either (Matt. 26:52).

What about the Bible in general? Does it support socialism/communism's desire to legislate wealth redistribution? Under the Old Covenant, which was specifically for the nation of Israel (Deut. 5:2-3), God legislated a ten percent tax called a tithe (Lev. 27:32); it was to be used to support the priesthood, not to redistribute wealth to the poor. (God had a process for helping the poor [Lev. 19:9-10], but it didn't include wealth redistribution.) However, when Jesus died on the cross, "He wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (Col. 2:14). The word "wipe out" means to obliterate or erase. The Old Covenant was obliterated by Christ! Because of this, there are no more tithes that God expects anyone to levy, government sponsored or otherwise.

Some might object and say that since God provided government under the Old Covenant, then that government should serve as a model for government today. To the contrary, God's purpose for using a government under the Old Covenant was to ensure the coming of the Messiah. In Galatians 3:24-25, the apostle Paul wrote, "Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor." A "tutor" (Greek: *paidagogos*, lit. a little-child leader) was a person who escorted children to a teacher. Today, we call them school-bus drivers. In other words, the law was a school-bus driver to escort us to our Teacher and Messiah, Jesus. The *paidagogos* becomes obsolete after he completes his task. This means that the government God used under the Old Covenant is now obsolete since there are no more Messiahs coming; that government had a unique purpose in the history of the world that no government will ever fulfill again.

Some may ask, "Doesn't the Bible teach us to obey the government?" Yes. Passages such as Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17 command us to obey the law and even pay taxes. However, the Bible also teaches that if these laws contradict God's law, we have an obligation to obey God first (Acts 5:29). This in no way suggests that God sanctions a specific form of government.

Can advocates of income redistribution find support in the New Testament? The words of the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 9:7 speak God's desires for how the church is to collect funds: "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver." While God desires that we give, it is to be a free-will offering, not a government legislated obligation. It was this kind of giving that was done in Acts 2:44-45 and Acts 4:32-37. This giving was voluntary, not mandatory. Peter makes this clear in Acts 5:4 when he said to Ananias, "While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control?" In other words, Ananias was under no obligation to give this money (His sin was in lying about what he gave, Acts 5:4). Having said that, does the church have the obligation to help the poor? Yes, but it is to be done as we have opportunity (Gal. 6:10).

While socialism/communism conflicts with religion in many ways (its founders, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, were atheists), the heart of its message is to employ the power of government to force economic change on societies by centrally controlling their capital through state ownership of property. Neither Jesus, nor the Bible, endorses such a system. To suggest otherwise is a failure to understand Jesus, who teaches His disciples to help the needy as a personal responsibility and as a work of the church.