

# Socialism

By Scott Huckaby  
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A lot of the inspiration for this Bible study came from [gotquestions.org](http://gotquestions.org), a great resource.

## What is Socialism?

- Socialism is a system in which the means of production, distribution, and exchange of goods are regulated by the community as a whole.
- It is often juxtaposed with capitalism, a system in which the means of production, distribution, and exchange are controlled by each individual.

## How did socialism become such a popular idea?

The most prominent philosopher to advocate socialism was Karl Marx. Born to German Jewish parents in 1818 and received his doctorate at age 23, he then set out to prove that human identity is bound up in a person's work and economic systems totally control a person.

- Marx saw the Industrial Revolution as changing the basic lifestyle of humanity, because, those who had freely worked for themselves were now forced by economics to work in factories instead.
- This, Marx felt, stripped away the dignity and identity of people who were reduced to mere slaves controlled by a powerful taskmaster.

## What kind of economy does Marxism establish?

- The basic idea of Marxism is that the ruling class in any nation has historically oppressed the lower classes, and thus social revolution is needed to create a classless, homogeneous society.
- Marxism teaches that the best system of government is one in which wealth is distributed equally, there is no private property.

## Why is eliminating private property so important to Marxism?

In Marx's mind, the business owners, or the bourgeoisie, exploited the working class, or the proletariat.

- He assumed that one person's gain is another person's loss.

## A basic tenet of Marxism is to abolish private property; is that biblical?

The Bible assumes the existence of private property and issues commands to respect it:

Deuteronomy 5:19 – *"You shall not steal"*

Such a command is meaningless if there is no private property. The Bible honors work and teaches that individuals are responsible to support themselves:

2 Thessalonians 3:10 – *The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat*

The redistribution of wealth mandated by Marxism destroys accountability and the biblical work ethic.

- Jesus' parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30) teaches our responsibility to serve God with our (private) resources.

## What are the flaws in Marxist philosophy?

a person's gain must come at another person's expense

- Capitalism leaves plenty of room for all to raise their standard of living through innovation and competition. So, win-win is possible.

the value of a product is based on the amount of labor put into it

- Not true: Quality. For example, a master carpenter can more quickly and beautifully make a piece of furniture than an unskilled craftsman can.

a person's identity is bound up in the work that he does

- The Bible says that all have equal worth because all are created in the image of the eternal God.

economics is the catalyst that drives human history

- No, what directs human history is the Creator of the universe who controls everything, including the rise and fall of every nation and the economy.
- it is God who gives a person skill at labor and the wealth that comes from it, not the government:  
Ecclesiastes 5:18–19 – *Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the*

*sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward. Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God*

Frederick Engels, a close associate of Karl Marx, said that Marx's greatest insight was that "men must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing before they can pursue politics, science, art, religion and the like"

("Speech at the Grave of Karl Marx," Highgate Cemetery, London. March 17, 1883, transcribed by Mike Lepore).

### **How do Marxist priorities clash with Christianity?**

Matthew 6:26, 33 – *Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? . . . Seek first [God's] kingdom and his righteousness*

Marxism seeks to meet the physical needs of man and says that, until those needs are met, man is incapable of any aspirations higher than an animal-like existence.

- Jesus' words are the antithesis of Marxism, and it's one reason why Karl Marx reviled Christianity.
- The utopia that Marxism seeks to develop is earthly and man-made; Christians look to the Lord Jesus to establish a heavenly, perfect kingdom.
- The Bible promotes freedom and personal responsibility, and neither of those concepts lasts long under Marxism.

### **Where has Marxism worked to improve the lot of the common man?**

You'd think we'd learn the lessons of history that Marxism fails everywhere it is tried.

- The implosion of the Soviet Union is the most significant of these but we have also seen the collapse of centrally planned economies in Eastern Europe along with Central and South America. Venezuela is the latest glittering jewel of socialism.
- We have seen communist societies transformed by adopting capitalistic free market reforms in China, India, and elsewhere in southern and eastern Asia.
- The Puritans in Massachusetts tried communal living for a while. The Plymouth Colony was founded with no private property; all food was distributed equally regardless of one's job (or work ethic). But that system lacked any incentive to hard work and was abandoned as a complete failure.

See "Of Plymouth Plantation" by Governor William Bradford for the full story.

### **How do Christians fare under Marxism?**

They are persecuted. That's because there's a foundational difference between Marxism and Christianity...

- Marxism is, at heart, an atheistic philosophy. Marx wrote in 1844, "The first requisite of the happiness of the people is the abolition of religion" ("A Criticism of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right,").
- Marx felt that religion is the "opiate of the masses," which the rich use to manipulate the working class; the proletariat is promised rewards in heaven one day if they keep working diligently
- Marxism makes the state the provider, sustainer, protector, and lawgiver for every citizen; in short, the state takes the place of God. Marxism is the ultimate expression of humanism.

### **How has the philosophy of Marxism been applied to more than just economics?**

The rise of social justice. The term cultural Marxism has been used to describe the idea that society is made of oppressors and the oppressed. So, people who do not support gay marriage are oppressing gay people.

- This zero-sum-game-theory is behind the concept of critical race theory which is even finding traction in the leadership of the SBC.

### **Why are we seeing more support for socialism?**

It is the times we are living in, as we get closer to the Tribulation, we should expect the trajectory of the economy to trend toward central control...

Revelation 13:17 – *that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.*

The spirit of the Age is the spirit of Antichrist...

Daniel 11:24 – *he shall disperse among them the plunder, spoil, and riches*

### **Why are Christians increasingly being supportive of socialism?**

With the apostasy of the church, there is increasing compromise with the world...

1 Timothy 4:1 – *Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons*

### **Why do Christians have a propensity to embrace socialism?**

It is a part of our nature to care for those who are needy:

Matthew 25:40 – *the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me*

Indeed, Scripture explains the nature of "true religion"

James 1:27 – *Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world*

God made provisions in the old and new covenants to care for these outcasts of society. The model this is Jesus Himself, who reflected God’s sense of justice by seeking out the outcasts of society with the gospel.

- Capitalism is rejected as unchristian because it is supposedly based on greed.
- Capitalism is seen to be the cause of inequality as the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, which seems to go against biblical values.

### **How do Christians see biblical support for socialism?**

Isaiah 1:17 – *Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow*

This sounds like it is right out of Marx’s writings that see society as being made up of the oppressed and the oppressors. But that is reading something into Scripture that is not there. And then there is provision for gleaning:

Deuteronomy 24:19–22 – *When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this*

Provision is made to care for the needy by not harvesting everything. But note that the needy will have to work for what they receive... it is not harvested for them and just given to them.

Acts 4:32–35 – *All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need*

This passage, as with much of Acts, is descriptive, not prescriptive; that is, there is no command for the church; it

is simply a description of what the early church in Jerusalem did to meet some unique and urgent needs.

- Such extensive sharing was never copied by other New Testament churches.
- The communal arrangements in Acts were completely voluntary and motivated by the love of Christ. Any attempt to apply this to involuntary, secular (godless) communism really makes no sense.

### **What is the problem with using passages such as these to make a biblical case for socialism?**

- None of these passages call for a socialist society or mandates a redistribution of wealth.
- The Law did not call Israel to redistribute wealth or censure people who gained wealth; rather, there were programs in place to prevent generational poverty (e.g., limitation of debt slavery and the Year of Jubilee).

### **What is Capitalism?**

An economic system characterized by private or corporate ownership of capital goods, by investments that are determined by private decision, and by prices, production, and the distribution of goods that are determined mainly by competition in a free market.

### **What does the Bible say about capitalism?**

While the Bible doesn’t mention capitalism by name, it does speak a great deal about economic issues.

- whole sections of Proverbs and many of the parables of Jesus deal with economic matters.

Since economics is an area where much of our everyday life takes place, we should evaluate it from a biblical perspective. When the Bible is our framework, we will seek an economy that liberates human potential and limits human sinfulness.

Genesis 1:28 – *God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”*

One aspect of this is that humans can own property in which they can exercise their dominion. Since we have both volition and private property rights, we can assume that we should have the freedom to exchange these private property rights in a free market where goods and services can be exchanged.

### **How does the free market compensate for the propensity of people to act selfishly?**

Romans 3:10 – *There is none righteous, no, not one*  
Historically, the free enterprise system has provided the greatest amount of freedom and the most effective economic gains of any economic system ever devised.

- In essence, self-interest is rewarded in a free capitalist system.

### **What is the difference between self-interest and selfishness?**

Self interest is a good thing... even the gospel appeals to self-interest, it is in our self-interest to accept Jesus Christ as our savior in order to have eternal life.

- Selfishness is a sinful manifestation of self-interest that puts self ahead of others including God.
- We can have self-interest that does not rise to the level of putting oneself ahead of others. Win-win, not win-lose: selling a product at a fair price for example.
- economic justice can best be achieved if each person is accountable for his own productivity.

### **How is the biblical concept of freedom most compatible to the free market system?**

John 8:36 – *if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.*

Capitalism liberates economic potential emphasizing personal freedom over governmental control.

- When government is not controlling markets, there is economic freedom

Capitalism also provides for political freedom

- once we limit the role of government in economics, we limit the scope of government in other areas.
- It is no accident that countries with the greatest political freedom also have economic freedom.

### **So, is capitalism a perfect economic system?**

No, it is just better than all the others.

- many proponents of capitalism hold a view known as utilitarianism, which believes the end justifies the means, a clearly unbiblical perspective
- capitalism can result in monopolies which hurts people... government should not allow any enterprise to get too big.

### **Christians often oppose free enterprise because of greed; is that a valid position?**

We must ask whether capitalism makes people greedy or do we already have greedy people who use the economic freedom of capitalism to achieve their ends?

Jeremiah 17:9 – *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?*

In light of the biblical view of human nature, the latter seems more likely.

- Because people are selfish, some are going to use the freedom of capitalism to satisfy their greed.

- Capitalism is a system in which bad people can do the least harm and good people have the freedom to do good.
- Capitalism works best with moral people. But it also functions adequately with selfishly greedy people.

### **So, what are the lessons learned from this discussion of a biblical look at socialism?**

- We should resist the trend of society and even the church to embrace socialism.
- The world's economic system will be socialist during the Tribulation. We can't stop it but we can delay in in this country.