

Text: various

We are continuing my answer to the question, “What does the Bible say about Communism?”

As you know, the Bible doesn’t address communism directly, but it does address subjects that contradict the central ideas of communism.

We had this quote from the Encyclopedia Britannica about Marx’s communist theory:

“His theory has three main aspects: first, a materialist conception of history; second, a critique of capitalism and its inner workings; and third, an account of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and its eventual replacement by communism.”¹

Last week I spoke more in depth about the godless materialism that undergirds communism. That’s why the communist states see religion as a threat, it attacks a core article of its faith, that is, there is no spiritual world, and therefore no God.

Today we are going to address Marx’s “critique of capitalism and its inner workings.” This critique of capitalism means a replacement with socialism.

Here is the OED on socialism:

“A theory or system of social organization based on state or collective ownership and regulation of the means of production, distribution, and exchange for the common benefit of all members of society.”²

If capitalism is bad, then collectivism is good: that’s the Marxist idea.

What I propose to do is show that the Bible opposes this approach to property, in both Old and New Testaments, and even (apparently) into the Kingdom age.

Proposition: The Bible assumes personal property ownership as the social norm, with individuals committed to supporting the general welfare of all.

¹ “Communism - Marxist Theory, Class Struggle, Revolution,” Encyclopedia Britannica, August 9, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/communism>.

² Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “socialism, n., sense 2”, July 2023.

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I. The problem of sin and capitalism

A. All have sinned (Rm 3.23)

Rm 3.23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

1. All means all – everyone is a sinner
2. All means you – you are a sinner
3. One problem with sin is that everything man does becomes quickly tainted with sin

B. Pre-Industrial revolution economy

1. Mostly a division between property owners and workers
2. The landed class had most of the wealth
3. The working class mostly worked the farms of the wealthy
 - a. Sometimes (England) on a tenant basis
 - b. Sometimes (Russia) on a serfdom basis
 - c. Also steps between these extremes
4. Mercantile class existed in cities, where a developing capital economy grew

To be sure, human sin corrupted these social structures as well, but things got worse in the Industrial Revolution

C. Industrial Revolution, unfettered capitalism, and abuses

1. With the advent of machines, those with capital could make sudden, immense profit (gaps grew wider)
2. Machine based production eliminated small scale home manufacturing
3. Reduced income for workers, and increased danger in industrial environments
4. Bad working conditions gave rise to Unions, violence and disturbances

This is where Marx came in and objected to the oppression of the poor by moneyed classes.

5. As the Industrial Revolution matured, governments eventually stepped in with regulations and anti-trust legislation

These solutions are not perfect, but the excesses put in check

Because of the abuses, Marxism promoted socialism to solve the problems: the collective (the masses) would work together to take care of the needs of all.

Note: this notion still ignores the basic problem, the sin problem.

Also note: my survey of history is an over-simplification.

II. The Biblical model of private property ownership

A. Old Testament passages

1. Patriarchal passages

- a. Cain and Abel brought offerings to the Lord out of the increase of their labour (Gen 4.2-4)
- b. In Cain's lineage, we have economic specialization noted (Gen 4.20-22)
 - 1) Those who dwell in tents and have livestock
 - 2) Those who play the lyre and the harp
 - 3) Those who forge implements of bronze and iron
- c. After the flood, Noah planted his own vineyard and drank from it (Gen 9.20-21)
- d. Abraham was nomadic, but obtained wealth from Egypt (Gen 13.2)
- e. Lot also had possessions [in conflict with Abraham's] (Gen 13.5, 7)
- f. Abraham purchased the site for Sarah's tomb (Gen 23.23-18)
- g. Isaac and Jacob obtain wealth for themselves (Gen 26.13-14, 31.9, 18)
- h. And Job is an example of man wealthy with many possessions (Job 1.1-3, 42.12)

2. Mosaic generation

- a. Told to plunder Egypt before leaving in the Exodus (Ex 11.2-3)
- b. Asked to give voluntary contributions towards tabernacle [implying ownership] (Ex 25.1-2, 35.5)
- c. The Land was not held collectively, but distributed among the tribes, then among individuals in the tribes (Num 26.52-56, 33.54, 34.13; Josh 14-15)
- d. Pattern continues through the monarchy, though unscrupulous men unjustly took the land of others (Naboth's vineyard, 1 Ki 21)
- e. Private property ownership continued before and after the exile (Jer 32.6-15, 43-44)

B. New Testament

1. Magi brought gifts for Christ (Mt 2.11)
2. Peter and Andrew partners with Zebedee, James and John in a fishing business (Lk 5.7, 10)
3. Christ admonishes to give alms in secret [implying a right to the property] (Mt 6.2-4)
4. Parables dealt with property and commerce as basis of story
 - a. hid treasure, pearl of great price Mt 13.44-46
 - b. man who let vineyard to workers Mt 21.33-40, Mk 12.1-11, Lk 20.9-16
 - c. parables of talents and pounds (Mt 25.14-30, Lk 19.1-27)
5. Jesus condemned Pharisees for devouring "widow's houses" – implying they had a right to them (Mt 23.14)
6. Jesus commended Mary when she spent a costly bottle of perfume to anoint his feet (Jn 12.3-7)

Note: descriptions (implications) of an economic system are not endorsement

C. Legal protections of private property

1. Thou shalt not steal (Ex 20.15)
2. Thou shalt not covet (Ex 20.17)
3. God protects people against fraud, supports honest commerce

Lev 19.36 'You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin; I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt.

Dt 25.15 "You shall have a full and just weight; you shall have a full and just measure, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.

Pr 11.1 A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, But a just weight is His delight.

Pr 16.11 A just balance and scales belong to the LORD; All the weights of the bag are His concern.

4. God's view of wealth

a. Blessing

Pr 10.22 It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich, And He adds no sorrow to it.

b. Fruit of hard work

Pr 13.4 The soul of the sluggard craves and *gets* nothing, But the soul of the diligent is made fat.

c. Administered under good stewardship

Pr 27.23-27 Know well the condition of your flocks, *And* pay attention to your herds; ²⁴ For riches are not forever, Nor does a crown *endure* to all generations. ²⁵ *When* the grass disappears, the new growth is seen, And the herbs of the mountains are gathered in, ²⁶ The lambs *will be* for your clothing, And the goats *will bring* the price of a field, ²⁷ And *there will be* goats' milk enough for your food, For the food of your household, And sustenance for your maidens.

5. Prophecy for the millennium (Ezek 45.8 et al)

Ezek 45.8 “This shall be his land for a possession in Israel; so My princes shall no longer oppress My people, but they shall give *the rest of* the land to the house of Israel according to their tribes.”

There are similar passages in the NT, but I think you have gotten the point so far. The Bible does not prohibit private property ownership, rather it encourages it.

III. The Biblical model of public welfare

I have to be brief here...

A. The Old Testament provisions for the needs of others through property management, ownership, generosity, assistance

Dt 15.1-2 ¶ “At the end of *every* seven years you shall grant a remission of *debts*.² “This is the manner of remission: every creditor shall release what he has loaned to his neighbor; he shall not exact it of his neighbor and his brother, because the LORD’S remission has been proclaimed.

Dt 15.7-10 ¶ “If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother;⁸ but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need *in* whatever he lacks.⁹ “Beware that there is no base thought in your heart, saying, ‘The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,’ and your eye is hostile toward your poor brother, and you give him nothing; then he may cry to the LORD against you, and it will be a sin in you.¹⁰ “You shall generously give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all your undertakings.

1. Don’t have time for detail, see our Wed night study a couple of weeks ago
2. Note this though: God tempered “naked capitalism” – property ownership is a stewardship to benefit others

B. New Testament examples

¹ Tim 5.3-8 ¶ Honor widows who are widows indeed;⁴ but if any widow has children or grandchildren, they must first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God.⁵ Now she who is a widow indeed and who has been left alone, has fixed her hope on God and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day.⁶ But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives.⁷ Prescribe these things as well, so that they may be above reproach.⁸ But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

1. Again, the NT teaches care for others, a counter to naked capitalism
2. Churches and family members are to help their own in need

Conclusion:

Socialism doesn't solve the sin problem. It takes away private property, destroys incentives, and impoverishes many.

In practice, the elites in socialism become enriched, while the majority ends up trying to support them ... and you still have the poor.

The Bible doesn't say that capitalism is pure (because capitalists are sinners), but it does teach a method of caring for one another that involves private ownership of property and regenerated (and generous) hearts.