Four Bible Verses that Destroy Socialism and Uphold Free Enterprise

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In their excellent volume titled *Understanding the Times: A Survey of Competing Worldviews* (Manitou Springs, CO: Summit Ministries, 2016, p. 100), Jeff Myers and David A. Noebel describe contrasting economic systems as part of their discussion on worldviews. They define **socialism** as "an economic system based upon governmental or communal ownership of the means of production and distribution of goods and services," and **capitalism** or **free enterprise** as "an economic system in which capital assets are privately owned, and the prices, production, and distribution of goods and services are determined by competition within a free market."

Note that a critical difference between socialism and free enterprise relates to property and other assets. Socialism calls for collective ownership and control of property and wealth, and capitalism upholds the ideals of private property and property rights — individual freedom to own and manage assets and resources for one's own benefit. (Keep in mind that benefiting oneself within the free-market system means benefitting others by providing goods and/or services people want and for which they are willing to pay. My main point here, though, is the necessity of property rights in a free-market economy and the denial of those rights with socialism.) Karl Marx himself said, "The theory of Communism [socialism's ideological sister] may be summed up in one sentence: Abolish all private property."

Therefore, at the outset, we must realize that in the debate between socialism and free enterprise, property and property rights are linchpin issues. You can't have pure socialism *with* private property ownership and management, and you can't have a genuine free-market economy without them. So, you tell me what you believe about private property ownership and other property rights, and I'll be able to tell you whether you're a socialist at heart or an advocate of free enterprise.

What does the Bible say about socialism and free enterprise? Does it tell us anything? With the above information in mind, let's consider four Bible verses.

First, Exodus 20:15 forbids stealing. A prohibition against stealing presupposes property ownership, including rights of and extending from possession of property and wealth by individuals. The Eighth Commandment, therefore, assumes the validity and reality of ownership rights over material goods and other forms of wealth. This is a death-blow to socialism.

Second, the prohibition in Exodus 20:17 against coveting means we are to respect property rights, not merely tolerate them. Here, socialism takes another lethal hit.

Third, Ephesians 4:28 indicates the thief should stop stealing and instead must work, first to provide for himself, but also to earn enough so he can assist those really needing help. Work, pay, exercising responsibility over oneself and one's assets, and practicing charity — all of these — are inherent in this verse. Guess what? All of them are *inconsistent* with socialism's tenets, but they align well with free-market principles in both theory and practice.

Fourth, 2 Thessalonians 3:10, Paul indicated that the one who will not work — not the one who *cannot* work— should not be allowed to eat. This principle validates the legitimacy of rewards and consequences proportionate to the quality and quantity of an individual's productive work. In other words, diligence and excellence should be rewarded, and laziness and inexcusable substandard work should be penalized. Paul not only practiced this principle when he lived and ministered among the Thessalonians; he also reminded the Thessalonians of it as a valid guideline. It devastates socialism but is a strong element of a free-market economic model.

Of course, advocates of socialism point to numerous Bible passages to argue that the Bible teaches socialism — or even simply allows it. We've not been able to address those passages in this short article, but trust me: Close examination of all of them reveals that they don't teach socialism at all but are entirely compatible with the four verses we have discussed here. This should not surprise us. Scripture does not contradict itself.

In *How Christianity Changed the World,* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004, p. 205), sociologist and historian Alvin J. Schmidt observes (emphasis added),

> Just as God does not want people to be coerced in spiritual matters, so too he does not want them to be coerced in earthly matters, for instance, in their economic activities. *There is not a single reference in either the Old or New Testament in which God denies economic freedom to people, as in fascism, socialism, and communism*.

Don't be misled. Socialism and Scripture are incompatible — completely.

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