

What's So Wrong With Socialism?

Four Key Truths Everyone Needs to Know

By Eric Holmberg

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"From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs." **Karl Marx, 1875**

"We believe 'we're all in this together' is a better philosophy than 'you're on your own.'" **Bill Clinton, Democratic Convention, 2012**



"...and, and, and they (the American people) have an opportunity to succeed, everybody is getting a fair shot and everybody is getting a fair share..." **Barack Obama, First Presidential Debate, 2012**

First, allow me to be very clear: As a Christian I believe we are to love our neighbor, help bear each others burdens, weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice. I believe that "true and undefiled religion is to care for the widow and orphan" (James 1: 27) and that faith without works is dead. I believe that as we serve and minister to "the least of these" (including, just by the way, our little brothers and sisters who are temporary aquanauts in their mothers' wombs) we do it to and for the King of all kings.

The big difference between me and Karl Marx (and yes, Clinton, Obama *and most Republicans for that matter*) is that I believe compassion and the aforementioned good works should be voluntary and are best expressed on an individual and community level, not coerced and administered by bureaucrats in Moscow or Washington D.C.

I believe this for four reasons. My prayer is that you will carefully consider these key principles and incorporate them into the foundations of your worldview as well. Through government education, the popular media and decades of creeping socialism in federal and state programs, most of us have been infected with the virus that Marx and Lenin helped make so virulent and universal.

We desperately need an antidote.

So just what is so wrong with socialism? Or to be more specific, what's wrong with having government regulate an individual's—or an aggregate of individuals, a business or a nation's—labor and the wealth produced by that labor? What's wrong with expecting government to ensure that people's basic needs are met and a “level playing field” is created where “we're all in this together” and “we all get our fair share?”



1. It's unbiblical. There isn't time here to fully develop what it is a fairly detailed and nuanced apologetic, but writ large:

- Covetousness (see 10th commandment) is morally wrong. And there is simply no way to avoid fanning the fires of covetousness once a nation signs on to government-run and enforced wealth redistribution.

• We're to render to Caesar the things that are his...but be very careful that we never offer or submit to him the things that belong to God. As His image bearer, we have been given the capacity and the impulse to worship something higher than ourselves. And most Americans can agree, at least in theory, that our worship belongs to God and not Caesar or some other creaturely or man-made idol. (The sad fact is that the majority of Americans are now more likely to look to Caesar for their needs than God, but would never admit it in such stark terms.) What is not as obvious to us today—though our founders clearly understood it—is that along with worship the LORD has given us the capacity and the duty to work (Gen. 1:28). And that work, along with our worship, belong to God and not Caesar. Translation: *It is unbiblical for government to tax a man's labor.* And this, along with the redistribution of the resources gained by that labor, are the linchpin of socialism.



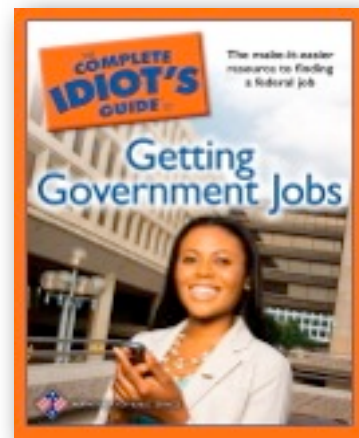
• God does not show favoritism or partiality (Acts 10:34) and we are called to be like Him. In other words, we're to treat people equitably and without prejudice in regard to social position, ethnicity, language and all manner of other ultimately superficial distinctives.

Now this fits in well with the socialist agenda when we're talking about the rich (see James 2:3; Job 34:19). (Unless, of course, you happen to be one of the "party bosses" and want to line your own pockets). But equality cuts both ways. Exodus 30:15 further tells us that the wealthy are not to be singled out and made to pay more than the poor. And Jesus Himself declared that when a person with limited resources was unfaithful with what little they had, even that little should be taken away and given to someone who has been faithful. (Matthew 25: 14-30; see vs. 28.) (Note: This passage should not be taken out of its parabolic context and

used as a proof text for economic policy. But there's a principle here about stewardship and responsibility we ignore at our own peril.)

- Matthew 6:3 (*But when you do merciful deeds, don't let your left hand know what your right hand does*) makes it clear that charitable works are to be done privately, with discretion and without fanfare. Government-run charity fails on all three counts.

2. It's very inefficient. I once worked for a sub-contractor that had been hired by the government to fabricate piping on the space shuttle's mobile launcher. Overseeing a crew of union pipe-fitters, I saw first-hand what a government-run operation was like. And most people who've had similar experiences can confirm what I learned: if federal regulations, bureaucrats and lawyers are involved, whatever you're doing is going to take at least twice as long and cost twice as much. *At least.*



And if this is true with something as straightforward as cutting, bending and welding stainless steel pipe, imagine the potential for waste, fraud, stupidity and bureaucratic and legal bottlenecks when dealing with something as complex and nuanced as dispensing charity (or, for that matter, health care).

Those of us who give to private, non-government organizations (NGOs) like the Red Cross or World Vision should understand the importance of considering the ratio of administrative costs to total donations in determining whether a particular charity deserves our support. According to organizations that exist to monitor NGOs that solicit charitable gifts, the best ones in the field of what we might term “welfare” (providing food, clothing and shelter) are



able to put 85% to 100% of the resources donated to work in helping meet intended needs. And anything less than 70% would receive a zero, or failing, rating. In other words, we shouldn't give a dime to such an organization.

In 1982 the Grace Commission undertook a two-year, \$76 million study (paid for, by the way, by private-sector donations) to investigate government spending and make specific recommendations as to how our country could operate more efficiently and equitably. The study concluded that only 66% of government revenues end up being used to generally accomplish their intended purpose. As a dispenser of charity, in other words, our government gets a failing grade.

And this is really only half the story. Because even after revenues are frittered away on administrative, legal, waste, and fraud expenses, how much of the remaining 66% ends up going to the people who are the most deserving of help?

There is simply no way a large, centralized bureaucracy can compete with smaller, community-based charities when it comes to having the necessary wisdom and discernment to operate such an important and nuanced enterprise as caring for the “the least of these.”



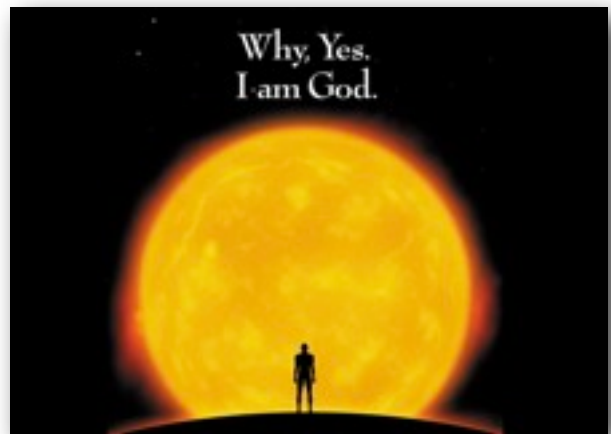
3. It feeds man's carnal impulse to “play God”—and, as a result grow government. Anyone with a Biblical worldview accepts the Fall as being foundational to a proper anthropology. Left

to ourselves, the doctrine of original sin declares, we will always prefer our own understanding about reality, meaning and ethics to God's (Prov. 3:5) and will therefore seek to overthrow His rule and set ourselves up in His place of ultimate authority. (Psalm 2). In addition, the one thing that we, in our fallenness, have that remains the most like God is moral knowledge (Gen. 3:22; Rom. 2:15). Therefore, the default setting in our hearts as we impulsively seek to "play God" is to try and be like God—to behave morally, to "do good."

This is precisely why the most common answer to "Why will you go to heaven when you die?" is customarily "Because I'm a good person; because I've done good works." And among the most universally accepted good works is to push back against the obvious manifestations of the Fall: hunger, poverty, sickness, oppression and war.

Now don't get me wrong. These are the very things we—and particularly Christians—are called by God *to do*. But the rub is that we need to do them God's way (or we can make the problem worse) *and also for the right reasons*. And playing god is definitely not one of them.

Now as individuals the only person most of us can fool by our play-acting is ourselves. (Please understand that I am not saying that the average person who does this *consciously* believes they're God incarnate; only that they *behave* as if they are because their "take" on reality, meaning and ethics is fundamentally self-referential.) But that can change when you bring a critical mass of



these same people together and grant them significant control over other people's lives and money. Not only can they really start thinking and acting like little gods, they can get many of their supporters to go along with the charade. (See North Korea for an example of this on steroids.) Eventually, those qualities and abilities that only God can fulfill are granted to the aggregate of these leaders, the government.

Let me give you a very practical example of what I mean here. One of the most common refrains these days among progressives is "Let's make sure the rich pay their fare share." How many thousands of times has this sentiment has been expressed by Democratic pundits and candidates during this election cycle? But stop and think about what is really behind this assertion; tragically one the average American now reflexively believes to be Gospel. (In a very real sense, that is precisely what it has become for them: a promise of some kind of salvation.) What does "fair" mean? What level of income does one have to achieve to be considered "rich?" Who determines that threshold...and how? And over what period of time do these arbiters use to measure their subject's "richness"?

Take, for example, a man who builds his own business over ten years. Over that decade he makes an average of \$25K/year when he could have made \$100K/year working for Acme, Inc. (or the government), a sacrifice he willingly makes in order to pursue his dreams. Then his business takes off and he starts making \$300K/year. On the 11th year does he become one of the rich who now needs to pay his "fair share"? And how much of his



money should be confiscated and redistributed to make things “fair?” And again, who’s determines that...and by what standard?

I could go on and on pointing out the fallacies, absurdities and almost pathological hubris that lie beneath the surface of this “pay their fair share” platitude.

The only person who possesses the omniscience and moral perfection to determine what is truly fair is God. And the more mere men set themselves up as the arbiters of fairness and arrogate to themselves the power to try and make things fair (in their estimation) the larger, the more wasteful, corrupt, counter-productive and, ironically, *the less fair* that government will become.

And it is worth noting that things only become worse when these mere men, these arbiters of fairness, are drawn from the ranks of lawyers, professional politicians, and academics rather the “blood, sweat and tears” world of business—people who actually have hands-on experience in creating wealth and real jobs for working Americans.



4. It helps endanger human souls. Humanism, by which I mean the philosophy that “man is the measure of all things,” is at bottom a demonic doctrine, one that will in the end condemn more people to hell than the worship of pagan idols and even Satan. (The smarter, more epistemologically self-aware satanists acknowledge that humanism is just satanism with a smiley face.) As such, even “the tender mercies”

of the humanistic “are cruel.” (Pro. 12:10) How many people have been helped along in their bondage to covetousness, envy, sloth, an entitlement mentality, sexual immorality (re: government funded contraceptives and abortion), etc. by their dependency on the federal plantation and its “bleeding heart” masters?

But I am also concerned about the souls of these masters. How easy is it to save one’s conscience, to deceive yourself into thinking you have done good and deserve heaven because you believe yourself to be concerned about social justice and are willing to invest a lot of *other people’s money and effort* to advance the cause?

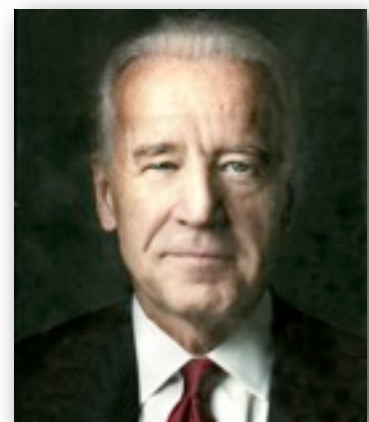


Perhaps the best example of what I am talking about here is vice-president Joe Biden. The consummate progressive, Time magazine recently referred to his “heart”—his supposed concern for the less fortunate—as the Democratic party’s “killer ap.”



Well the adjective is indeed an accurate one, though not in the way the liberal press intended. Not only has Biden’s socialist policies helped kill the economy and our culture’s historic impulse towards individual freedom, responsibility and innovation; not only has it helped fasten the chains of an entitlement mentality on millions of our fellow citizens, it has every appearance of having blinded his own eyes to the state of his soul.

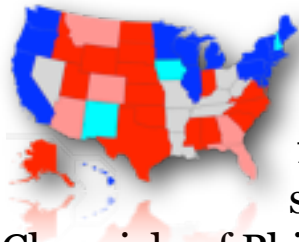
A self-professing “devote” Roman Catholic, Biden has shown no shame in trampling on



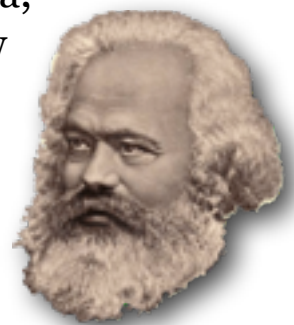
some of the most timeless and important teachings his church holds to be sacred: among them sexual purity, biblical marriage, and the sanctity of life. But perhaps most breathtakingly hypocritical of all (and just a quick read through the Gospels makes it clear how tough Jesus was on hypocrisy) is the amount of his *own money* he gives to help the less fortunate: *an average of a miserly .02 percent a year over the last decade.*

And still he was lauded at the 2012 convention as a champion of the poor and honored with an almost eight-minute long documentary that would have done Mother Theresa proud.

And this isn't an isolated instance. It's no secret, for example, that Democrats tend to support government-backed entitlements while Republicans want to limit them. (Though its important to note that our founding fathers would view today's GOP as a socialist party as well.) Well, a study by the Chronicle of Philanthropy found that the eight states that rank the highest in charitable giving per capita are solidly Republican while the seven lowest vote Democratic.



We began with the classic quote by Karl Marx expressing the essence of socialism. This *meme*, or tipping point idea, has metastasized and gone on to infect the worldview of millions today, effectively hijacking and rewiring the American experiment in Christian liberty. But what is telling is just how much the hypocrisy we've just looked at epitomizes his life. Paul Johnson, in his important book *Intellectuals*, recounts how the the founder of modern socialism was a man who (shades of the French Revolution) loved the idea of economic justice and the brotherhood of man while caring very little for actual people. He never once visited a factory or even met a



member of his beloved proletariat, except across a party platform. He treated his own servants poorly, keeping one bound and all but destitute through a form of indentured servanthood. He seduced his wife's servant, fathering a son which he proceeded to ignore, eventually forcing his benefactor Friedrich Engels to assume paternity. His daughter, Eleanor, later decried her father's cruel hypocrisies in a letter: "Is it not wonderful, when you come to look things squarely in the face, how rarely we seem to practice all the fine things we preach — to others?" She eventually committed suicide.

Fellow revolutionary and philosopher Mikhail Bakunin said of Marx: "(He) does not believe in God but believes much in himself and makes everyone serve himself. His heart is not full of love but of bitterness and he has very little sympathy for the human race." (pp. 72-73)

In Marx's relationship with Engels, a man who inherited great wealth from his bourgeoisie father, we see the template for socialism's future advances: scavenge the wealth created by capitalism and then use it to fund an ideology and a platform that in the end can only hinder or destroy productivity. Or to put it a bit more prophetically: *sire a bastard and then expect capitalism to pay for it.*

I close by remembering the wisdom of the one founding father who is claimed by the left and right alike. Thomas Jefferson believed a strong but limited government was necessary to protect the inalienable rights granted to men by "the laws of nature." (*Rights of British America*, 1774; an unfortunate choice of words resulting from the tare of Enlightenment humanism that infected



more than a few of our founders. Nature's laws only provide a "self-evident" basis for "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" if one is looking at them through the lens of a Judeo-Christian worldview. It would have been far better had he referenced the God of the Bible or, even better, the Lord Jesus Christ as the true source of these rights.) But did he see government as a vehicle to guarantee or spread happiness around by redistributing wealth? From his Inaugural Address of 1801:

"What more is necessary to make us a happy and a prosperous people? Still one thing more, fellow citizens—a wise and frugal Government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government, and this is necessary to close the circle of our felicities."

