

The Bible, Wealth and Private Property

In society, there are constantly attempts to distort the truth in the Bible. In this society, it has become even more easy to do so, because most Christians lack a good foundation in Biblical teaching. They can be led by the nose to a half-dozen passages, and easily led astray in this manner. One of these distortions is that, there is something inherently wrong about wealth, or anti-spiritual about possessing wealth. There is the mistaken impression that, it is the right thing to do for a believer to give his wealth away; or that the state ought to be intimately involved in the equalization of wealth. The key to the spiritual life is what is in the soul, not what is in one's bank account. More importantly, greed is not necessarily a sin of the rich, but more often, a sin of the poor.

1. Jesus is often inaccurately portrayed as some kind of a rebel, revolutionary or the first Che. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus was not a revolutionary; He did not try to overthrow the government or the establishment.
 - 1) He supported the paying of one's taxes.
 - 2) Jesus never organized some kind of movement which was pro-government or anti-government. Jesus did not organize people to march in the streets. He never organized people in such a way as to gain political power of any sort. He never organized people in such a way so that they could gain more government benefits.
 - 3) There were certainly instances when He faced injustice; and Jesus did not call for His disciples to bring the system down because of these injustices.
 - 4) When Judas complained that too much money was spent on oils and perfumes for Jesus' feet, and that this money ought to go to the poor; Jesus did not agree with Judas, but He pointed out that, **"The poor will be with you always."**
2. The Ten Commandments, which are a freedom code and not a means of salvation, have 3 commandments which are related to the protection of private property:
 - 1) Ex. 20:14 **You will not commit adultery.**
 - 2) Ex. 20:15 **You will not steal.**
 - 3) Ex. 20:17 **You will not covet your neighbor's house; you will not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.**
3. Although these laws were not given until around 1440 B.C., there were, apparently, other unrecorded laws known to Abraham prior to this. **"Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws."** (Gen. 26:5). We do not know what these laws and statutes all were. The only one which is clearly recorded is a requirement to execute those who murder, in Gen. 9:6. Since God does not change, we may reasonably assume that this laws were quite similar in nature to those given in Exodus, and included protections for private property as well.
4. God set up a system of laws for Israel. He could have institutionalized full-out socialism for Israel, but He did not. Now, every 50 years, God did some equalization of landholding (which Israel did not appear to follow through on); and He made certain that someone could not fall into debt, become a slave, and then

live as a slave for the rest of his life. However, apart from these 2 oddities in the law (I call them oddities, simply because there is no equivalency in other systems of law and no similar laws to be found in the Mosaic Law); there was no prescription for socialism in the Mosaic Law.

5. God gave the land of Canaan to the Israelites and divided it up among them. The book of Joshua.
6. Women in Israel had property rights. Num. 27:1–11
7. Many of the laws given by God to Israel were all about private property. Ex. 21:1–11 22:1–15
8. One of the buzzwords of the day is “greed;” which word we hear bandied about and associated with rich fat cats and Wall Street types. However, a poor person living in a dump living off of food stamps can have this exact same greed, if they look on someone else with more stuff and want that person’s stuff taken away. **You will not strongly desire your neighbor’s house, your neighbor’s wife or any of your neighbor’s wealth.** In the 10th commandment, this is clearly directed toward someone who has less than his neighbor who is, by the context of the 10th commandment, quite wealthy.
9. God’s promises to Abraham included a great land grant. **The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you."** (Gen. 13:14–17).
10. God had blessed Abraham with so much by way of wealth that, he and his nephew Lot could not keep their wealth separate (Gen. 13:1–12). God nowhere tells Abraham, “You know what, everything belongs to everybody. You and Lot need to just share all that you have; and share it with the people of Canaan as well.” In fact, after Lot and Abraham separate, each keeping their own personal wealth; it is then when God makes the great land promise to Abraham.
11. Many people in the Bible are quite wealthy, and God never tells them to give it all up for Him. Abraham, Job, David and Solomon, for example.
12. God removed Job’s wealth temporarily, not because wealth was bad or because Job was bad, but to illustrate some principles of divine viewpoint. In the very end, God not only restored Job’s fortune, but gave him twice as much as he had before (Job 42:10). God did not tell Job that he needed to share this fortune with anyone else.
13. Wealth is a detail of life, like anything else. You may have it, you may not. Moses had to step away from his life of promise and inherited wealth to lead the Jews out of Egypt. This did not mean that his wealth was wrong because it was wealth. It was wrong because it was intimately associated with Egypt and his position in Egypt.
 - 1) In one house that I lived, there was a great kitchen—my favorite kitchen ever. However, when I moved, I had to give up this great kitchen. It was a detail; I was unable to take it along with me to the other house I moved to. Moses, as next in line for the throne of pharaoh in Egypt, had to give that up

in order to obey God. What he gave up was a detail, just as that kitchen was for me (although I probably miss that damn kitchen more than Moses missed his earthly wealth).

14. It is not money or wealth that is wrong, but the love of money which is the root of all evil. 1Tim. 6:10
15. People with money or people whose lives revolve around money often are dismissive of spiritual things; or have a distorted view of spiritual things. However, the same thing is just as true of those who lobby for "social justice." Such people, if involved with a church, often distort the doctrines of the Bible within the church, neutralizing its spiritual impact.
16. Those on the left are fond of referring to 2 case histories, and try to sell us socialism and social justice based upon these 2 case histories. There is the rich young ruler and Ananias and Sapphira. We will take them one at a time. When evaluating a narrative, we have to be very careful when it comes to interpretation. In neither case, you can you read the narrative and immediately conclude, oh, this is God telling us that we need to have the government redistribute the wealth. There is simply no basis for that in either narrative.
17. The rich young ruler:
 - 1) Luke 18:18–25 **And a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'" And he said, "All these I have kept from my youth." When Jesus heard this, He said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."**
 - 2) First off, no one is saved by keeping the Law of Moses. It is the Mosaic Law which condemns us. **For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20). We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified (Gal. 2:16). For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." (Gal. 3:10; Deut. 27:26).**
 - 3) So, when he comes to Jesus to look to be justified by his own works (**"What must I do to have eternal life?"**), Jesus must disabuse him of the notion of salvation by works. So, what Jesus does is begin naming the Ten Commandments; He reads of commandments 6, 7, 8 and 9 in order; and the rich young ruler is bobbing his head up and down, because he has kept these commandments. He knows what is next on the

list—commandment #10: **you will not covet**. He's rich. He has the wired. He doesn't want anything that someone else has; he'll just go out and buy it; or buy a better one. However, what Jesus does is, instead of go to commandment #10, He goes back to commandment #5: **Honor your mother and father**. That ought to strike you as odd. Why does Jesus suddenly go back to this commandment? We can surmise by this man's relationship to his own wealth that, he did not give up any of this wealth to help his parents; and there was a gimmick in that age called Corban, where one could declare one's wealth dedicated to God, which meant, it could not be used for other things. So, apart from this man mad money, the rest was under corban; his parents might need a little cash now and then, but "Sorry, mom; I can't help you; it's under corban." Then Jesus tells him: **"One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."** This man is unable to do that. Wealth to him is not a detail; it is his very being; it is the core of his existence. It is his Achilles' heel.

- 4) It is important to note that Jesus told one man, on one occasion, to sell all that he had and to follow Jesus. If this is supposed to be done by all wealthy people, why doesn't Michael Moore do this, who claims to be liberal because he is religious? Why don't all Hollywood liberals do this?
 - 5) Secondly, Jesus had contact with other rich men, like Zacchæus, but never tells him to sell all of his possessions (Luke 19:2–6). Joseph of Arimathea owns the tomb where the body of Jesus is laid, and he is rich, and this is never made an issue of (Matt. 27:57–60).
 - 6) The problem is not that this man is wealthy; the problem is, he loved his wealth above all else, which is suggested when our Lord went back and gave the 5th commandment out of order.
 - 7) Notice how much different is this attitude as compared to Job. After having all of his wealth taken from him, and now, Job, in serious pain, has to deal with 3 friends, who are not really helpful to him, but just add to his pain. And Job finally says, **"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."** (Job 13:15a). Under the same circumstances, the rich young ruler would either say, "Give me back my money" or he would curse God and die (Job 2:9).
18. Ananias and Sapphira:
- 1) What did occur at the time, due to the great persecution that the church in Jerusalem faced is, they developed a private socialistic system. Nowhere else is this suggested or mandated. Acts 2:44–47
 - 2) Furthermore, we know by later epistles that, because of this system, the church and the people at Jerusalem struggled with finances until Jerusalem fell to the Romans. 1Cor. 16:1–3
 - 3) Acts 5:1–10 **But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was**

it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

- 4) You will note that the sin of Ananias and Sapphira was laying about what they gave. They pretended that they gave all that they had. Peter clearly tells them that their land belong to them and the proceeds from this land clearly belonged to them. The ownership was never in question. It was this lying deception that they did before the church which was the problem.
19. In other words, it is not the wealth and riches which is the problem; it is the condition of the soul. Having wealth is not an evil thing in itself. Else, why would God have so blessed Abraham, Job, David and Solomon? These material blessings are clearly from God. 2Sam. 12:8 Job 1:10 42:12
20. Giving is not the same as taxation, and giving is a mental attitude, not the amount which is given. Mark 12:41–44 2Cor. 9:6–8
21. When the far-left activist reads the Bible, it is not to discover truth, but with the intention of distorting truth. Therefore, they will ignore the fact that God has blessed many people with material blessings, and God did not rag on every person who had wealth, saying, "You need to give this wealth away." These far-left people take a few passages out of context and ignore the many passages which they disagree with. Such people will use the Bible to develop a manifesto, like Liberation Theology (and Black Liberation Theology), but they cannot be convinced by clear Biblical teaching otherwise. The Bible is not really the basis for their political philosophy; it is simply used in order to support that philosophy.
22. We find this same approach among those who teach that Jesus is some kind of political revolutionary. They cherry-pick a few passages, take them out of context; yet could not be convinced otherwise by the Bible. That is because their beliefs are far more important than the Bible. They merely use some portions of the Bible as propaganda. They do not see the Bible as the bastion of truth.
23. Whenever a dishonest liberal tries to equate greed with wealth, they clearly miss the fact that, our spiritual lives are based upon what is in the soul. Paul wrote to the Philippians: **I'm not saying this because I'm in any need. I've learned to be content in whatever situation I'm in. I know how to live in poverty or prosperity. No matter what the situation, I've learned the secret of how to live when I'm full or when I'm hungry, when I have too much or when I have too little. I can do everything through Christ Who strengthens me** (Philip. 4:11–13).
24. There are wealthy men throughout the New Testament who are not presented as evil or greedy.

- 1) There is Joseph of Arimathea who was a disciple of Jesus, and he asked for the body of Jesus and laid him in his own tomb. Matt. 27:57–59
 - 2) Zacchaeus was a rich man who was a tax collector, and Jesus stayed with him at his home (Luke 19:2–10). When Jesus was there, He told a parable about wisely investing one's money. The parable was based upon the idea that one ought to wisely invest money so that it grows (that was not the final meaning of the parable, but the meaning was based upon the wise investment of money). Luke 19:12–26
25. Many of the parables of Jesus as based upon free enterprise (capitalism). What is being taught are spiritual principles. However, these principles are based upon the underlying truth of capitalism.
- 1) The buying of a field for a treasure which is in the field. That involves the wise investment of capital in order to make a profit. Matt. 13:44
 - 2) A merchant purchasing a great pearl (probably with the intent of reselling it at a profit). Matt. 13:45–46
 - 3) The authority of the landowner (the business owner) over his employees. This is about the preeminence of the owner over the labor union. Matt. 20:1–16
 - 4) Property rights of a wealthy landowner. Matt. 23:33–40
 - 5) Again, all of these parables are teaching something else; however, they are all based upon the free function of capitalism.
26. Hard work is a good thing and wealth is a blessing from God. *Behold, what I have observed to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot. Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil--this is the gift of God. For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart* (Eccles. 5:18–20).
27. There are several things which bring great joy to the life of believers and unbelievers alike: enjoying the fruits of your labor, enjoying your right woman and enjoying your particular vocation. *Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do. Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun* (Eccles. 9:7, 9)..
28. At the same time, deference in the Christian life is not to be afforded to people on the basis of their wealth. When a poor man and Goldfinger both come into the congregation, you don't give some place of prominence to Goldfinger, and tell that poor man to find some place back in the hallway in which to hide. James 2:1–9 One could make this same application to nearly anything. Today, partiality might be shown to someone because of good looks and youth. Or, special attention might be given to someone who wanders into your congregation, and has some modicum of fame attached to him. James' reference here to a rich man is merely by way of illustration. The place of prominence is an example of deferential behavior; but it is not the only disparity in the treatment of someone. You may treat someone differently because of their relative attractiveness, their youth, their fame or their wealth. These are human characteristics and/or possessions. These superficial

things ought not affect the way that we interact with another believer. Think about the way that you treat your own mother—ideally speaking, you treat your mother with love and respect. She may not be rich or young or extremely attractive; but, ideally speaking, you treat her well. You may be in a situation to interact with another believer, and you may find that believer to be less than attractive to you and without any human prominence. Treat them with respect. They are probably some else's mother or father.

29. Taxation by the state is legitimate. In the Old Testament, this was 23 $\frac{1}{3}$ % (and a large portion of that went to state-supported religion). However, that state supported religion was only in Israel, which was a theocracy. There are no mandates in the Bible for believers in this age to establish a theocracy.
30. Jesus taught that taxation by the state is legitimate, even though the state may be seen as illegitimate. Matt. 27:17–21
31. Much as I would like to tell you that there is a tax which is too high, that is not found in the Bible. However, we know from simple trial and error that, reducing taxes spurs economic activity, which is good for the entire society. We have seen, through the lowering and raising of taxes, through the lowering and raising of federal debt levels, through the increase and decrease of federal employees, that there is a “sweet spot” where more of American is prosperous when this sweet spot is approached. For instance, under Kennedy, Reagan and Bush, prosperity and economic activity followed a reduction of taxes. Under Clinton, prosperity went hand-in-hand with reigning in the federal budget. Under FDR and Obama, great expansion of government and government spending was followed by little or no economic recovery.
32. An even better example is that of North and South Korea. When these nation split up in the Korean war, the North had greater resources. North Korea pursued a path of a carefully controlled and government-planned economy, whereas South Korea pursued free market principles (as well as evangelism and Christian growth). South Korea today is one of the strongest economies in the world, whereas, North Korea, which began with greater resources, is one of the weakest economies.
33. Apart from the Year of Jubilee in Israel (which was not brought into the Church Age), freedom results in unequal outcomes. This is noted in several of the parables and in our eternal state, which is not a state of equality. This is taught by the rewards we will have in heaven, by the concept of a victor in running a race, and by the concept of some people having crowns in heaven. Matt. 5:12 6:1 1Cor. 9:24 2Tim. 4:8 James 1:12 1Peter 5:4
34. To sum up, wealth is merely a detail. It is not right or wrong in itself. There are people in the Bible who were rich and others who were poor. Some rich men are spoken of kindly in the Bible, and others rich men are taken to task. It is not their wealth which is at issue, but the state of their souls. If you are a believer, and your life's driving force is all about making a lot of money, to the detriment of your spiritual life (or, even to the detriment of your family), then, you have a spiritual problem. However, it is not up to the state to fix this by taking some of your stuff away. God blesses some people materially, and others He does not. Material wealth is simply a detail of life, and it is certainly not the thrust of some sort of recommended or mandated Bible socialism.