

Better Off

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Someone once described socialism by saying, “Socialism holds out the hope that a man can quit work and be better off.” This denunciation looks at socialism as nothing but poison in the democratic system. And indeed socialistic democracy is the very machine that produced Adolph Hitler and provides too much of the philosophical basis of Barak Obama and the current Democratic Party. In truth, however, socialism – referring to the notion that goods and property are considered as belonging to the society and not to the individual(s) – is merely *one* mechanism whereby individuals are brought under control or relieved of their property or constitutional or inalienable human rights.

Capitalism, in some ways socialism’s opposite while in other ways socialism’s twin, is also a mechanism for control or oppression. Capitalism, built on the bodies of displaced, enslaved or exterminated indigenous people (most often so-called “savages” or “lower class”), has also done its part to transform work and employment into little more than slavery, causing men to desire a way to quit work and be better off. “Wage slave” (workers who cannot afford to leave or lose their jobs) is a term that came into use in America in the mid-1800s and “factory fodder” (workers dumbed down by the “educational” system and conditioned to be content in dead-end, no-way-out jobs) is a phrase currently in use in Britain. And all this simply fuels the international corporations and banking industry owned and controlled by and for the benefit of a relatively tiny number of individuals and families.

Behind the scenes, the ultra-rich bankers and “philanthropists” have and still do utilize their wealth to exploit, uphold and manipulate capitalistic and socialistic and democratic and dictatorial systems alike – only proving that no economic system is free from corruption or control. And into this well-developed, interlaced, devilish strategy of economic snares and controls walks the follower of Christ who is expected to live according to standards quite different from being motivated and controlled by the wealth and machinations of this world.

- “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and render to God the things that are God’s.” (Lk. 20:25) This first standard, impossible to codify, points out the difference immediately. Only the Holy Spirit can rightly identify the things of God (1 Cor. 2:11) and only those who “are led by the Spirit of God...are sons of God.” (Rom. 8:14) Only the sons of God, those led and ruled by His Spirit, can rightly discern between the things of God and the things of “Caesar,” that is, the government(s) of this world.

- “Seek first God’s kingdom and His righteousness – and all these things [food, drink, clothing, necessities] shall be added to you.” (Mt. 6:31-33) Though some “Christian” teachers proscribe saving pennies from every dollar and approaching life as if it were merely a game of “Monopoly” or “Life,” Jesus’ command is quite different: “Give, and it will be given to you...by your standard of measure it will be measured to you.” (Lk. 6:38) God’s kingdom here on earth is that realm or sphere wherein Christ is obeyed as the literal and true King (Lord, Master). Those who utilize the world’s methods to acquire security, comfort, convenience and wealth are *not* seeking first God’s kingdom or righteousness.

- “Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many sorrows.” (1 Tim. 6:9-10) When one tallies up the requirements alone for living in a particular area (rent or mortgage – Latin, *death grip* - utilities, food, clothing, transportation), one can readily see that a significant percentage of workers and employees easily come into the category of “wage slave.” But the vast majority of workers and employees are voluntary wage slaves because, in addition to the above *necessities* of life, these also believe that they *must* have these things in a *nicer* quality and that they *must* also acquire luxuries such as TVs, RVs, bikes, boats, motorcycles, computers (of course with their attendant gadgets and games that devour multiple hours of one’s time and life), etc. Many are further enslaved under deception because they simply fail to recognize that the culture, driven by greedy advertising men, is what is setting the standards for their life and *not* the Spirit of God. By neglecting the leadings of God’s Spirit they wander from the faith and bring themselves back under the judgment God has reserved for the sons of disobedience. (Eph. 5:5-6)

- “For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness... But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit unto holiness, and the end, everlasting life.” (Rom. 6:20, 22) Before we received Christ as Savior and Lord (King), we were slaves of sin with no hope of emancipation (redemption into liberty). Now that we are set free from sin, we become God’s slaves – required to bear the fruit of His holiness that confirms that we are genuinely on the road that leads to life. (Mt. 7:14) When we apply this standard to our individual lives, we must honestly and with divine discernment appraise whether our work (career, occupation, employment, job) is one that compels us to practice sin. Only a few occupations are so centered on sin that a believer *must* change his occupation or forsake Christ but nearly every occupation has built-in opportunities to practice sin of one sort or another.

- The follower of Christ whose profession or occupation involves stealing – and any occupation that procures wealth steals from or exploits someone in some way or other – must “steal no longer, but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need.” (Eph. 4:28) It is indeed a *requirement* for believers in Christ to labor (2 Ths. 3:10, etc.) but the believer must not be deceived into pursuing security or wealth or comfort or convenience or luxury at the expense of God’s will. It is also an error to believe one works merely to obtain the necessities of life for one’s self or family. Our work should be an expression of the will of God for our lives and from the blessings we received from doing the Lord’s will, there should be an abundance (not necessarily measurable in money or physical resources) from which we are to freely share with those around us who have need of what we have in abundance.

The question we must ask and answer in the fear of God and in the light of what He has revealed to us about our life in Him is: why am I involved in the business, trade or profession which I am in? We are where we should be when we can answer truthfully and sincerely (without deceit or guile of any sort) that “I am in this business or work only as a servant of Jesus Christ. He has led me to this work and therefore I work.”

The believer who desires (and believes this is also the command and direction of the Lord for the believer’s life) to serve the word of God to those around him faces a further perversion of this work. Paul prophesied, “From among your own selves [the elders of Ephesus] men [taking first the title “bishop” and then subsequently “pastor”] will arise, speaking corrupted things [such as Nicolaitan or “delegated” authority over other believers], to draw away the disciples after themselves [forcing men to be in subservience to the hierarchical, worldly authority structure most commonly called “church”].” (Acts 20:30) The believer who is being led by the Lord to proclaim the gospel of Christ must submit to many deceptions in order to take up the career of “pastor” over a “church” because centuries ago the itinerant workers of the gospel (apostles, prophets, heralds, shepherds, teachers, elders, overseers and servants) were replaced with officially titled officers of the same (or of transliterated Greek) names but of vastly different function and characteristic. Where Jesus said that His followers were not to lord over their brothers (Mt. 20:25-26, 1 Pet. 5:3, etc.), within two centuries after Christ’s death and resurrection, the *clergy* were expected to live and act as lords over the various flocks. To seek to both follow the Lord and work within the framework of the “church” virtually and all but entirely guarantees that one’s work is a wasted effort and, in reality, little more than enmity against the cross and kingdom of Christ.

In a culture where capitalism has transformed labor into virtual slavery and entices men to seek socialism’s solace and where socialism no longer contents itself to curb capitalism’s excesses but instead most often masquerades as a thinly-veiled disguise for smarmy elitism and oppression, what place is left for the genuine follower of Christ? To be *in* the world but not *of* the world (Jn. 17:14-18) is a balance that only each individual Spirit-led son of God can maintain. The standards of honesty, integrity and obedience to the will of God can only partially confirm us in our calling just as the pursuit of security, wealth, convenience and comfort and the sacrificing of our relationships with our spouse and children can only call into question the *manner* in which we pursue our work. We indeed live in the crux of absolute liberty and absolute responsibility for how we live our lives and the peace that surpasses understanding (Phlp. 4:7) will carry us through when rational understanding, as it must at some point do, fails. The one who lives carelessly, following after what is right in his own eyes (lawlessness – Greek *anomia* [459]) and neglecting what is right in God’s eyes (His righteousness, truth and holiness) will find himself excluded from the kingdom of God. (Mt. 7:23) The one who labors to gain for himself the things of this world can hardly expect to be well received in the kingdom which is to come (Lk. 9:25) as only he who *does* the will of God will be allowed to enter into God’s kingdom. (Mt. 7:21)

Work is not a means to earn God’s salvation – neither in a religious sense nor a professional sense. Work is simply an expression of our obedience to God. Those who allow their work to become their “God” are to be as equally pitied and reprov’d as are those who will not (note well this does not apply to those who *cannot*) work. That is, the man who works contrary to God’s will is as much in error as the man who refuses to work according to God’s will. Judging a person apart from knowing the will of God for their life is a mistake of colossal proportions – strongly similar to that made by the Pharisees who supposed that the man born

blind had also been born in sin and therefore could not possibly have a deeper understanding than theirs (Jn. 9:34), all while Jesus knew that the man's life, surely several decades long, had been "so that the work of God might be displayed in his life." (Jn. 9:3) In this culture saturated with the deceitfulness and deeply-laid economic schemes of the devil and the demonic, we simply must take care to judge nothing and no one according to appearances but rather we must judge all things with a righteous (what is right in *God's* eyes) judgment. (Jn. 7:24) Only in this way will we be "better off" in this life as well as in the eternal age to come.

Let he who has ears hear.

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