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DOES THE BIBLE TEACH SOCIALISM?

by

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Text: "But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto man, but unto God"

(Acts 5:3,4).

This is the fourth of a series of messages on secular humanism—the most entrenched and implacable antagonist which Christianity faces in America today. We have come to see how this is conceived in the national sphere. We find that secular humanists continually stress the need for more and more socialism. Because they deny the existence of God, they have obviously no Creator and are thrown back on evolution. Because there is no God who is the eternal lawgiver, they are thrown into situational ethics and moral relativism. Because there is no provident God to provide for the needs of His creation, they are thrown onto the provident state to provide for the needs of people.

There are those in the Christian community who certainly lend aid and support to them by saying that the Bible teaches socialism. There are, of course,

others who say that the Bible does not teach anything about economic matters such as this; that the Bible is not a textbook on economics. When you hear statements like: "The Bible is not a textbook on science," or "The Bible is not a textbook on economics or government" and so on, you should remember that the Bible is not a textbook on theology but rather the Bible is a revelation of God's dealings with mankind in all spheres and activities in this world.

Therefore, it reveals divinely given principles which affect every facet of man's existence; whether they be theological, spiritual, governmental, scientific, historical, economic, or anything else. When a person says the Bible is not a textbook upon such and such, you may rest assured what really is being said is that person rejects the broad principles the Bible lays down in a particular discipline. Because the Bible has been rejected with its guidance in every phase of man's life, the result is that millions of people today wander like mice in a maze or like people lost at sea in a ship without chart or compass. They know not whither they should go or even in which direction they should head. The Bible gives us principles which apply to every phase of our life.

Secular humanists continually extol this concept of socialism, praising the virtues of Karl Marx and the dynamic discovery that he made in the field of economics, and citing the need for America to abandon its free enterprise system in order to become socialized and collectivized. However, before we get into the secular humanist concept of socialism let us answer the question: Does the Bible teach socialism?

Those who claim it does invariably appeal to the passage from Acts dealing with Ananias and Barnabas.

Barnabas, you recall, sold a piece of land and brought the money and gave it to the apostles. Ananias and his wife sold a piece of land but kept back a part of the price. They brought only a portion of it to the apostles and lied about it. They say that this passage contains within it all the basic principles of socialism. I would like to submit to you the fact that not only does this passage *not* teach the principles of socialism but it countermands all the basic fundamental tenets of socialism and is an unparalleled broadside against the socialist ship of state. I do not see how one could have a more explicit repudiation of socialism than that found in this very passage. So, we will go right to the citadel of that passage in the Bible which the proponents of socialism claim teaches socialism, to see if indeed it does, or if it teaches, as I propose, the very opposite of socialism; its antithesis.

The basic concept of socialism is either that the state owns or controls the property or the means of production. Whether it owns them, as it does in Russia, or controls them, as it does in Sweden or Great Britain, makes ultimately very little difference. If you have a document that says you own these things and do not have the control, or furthermore, if you do not have the fruits of production left to you, it is an empty document indeed! One of the early French socialists, Proudhon, in the last century, made his famous declaration that "property is theft." An interesting statement, indeed. Marx and Engels and all the rest invade mightily against the concept of private ownership or control of the means of production.

What does the Bible say? In the Decalogue alone (the Ten Commandments) we have the repudiation of this. The commandment, "*Thou shalt not steal*", as virtually every theologian for twenty centuries has

declared, is a divine guarantee of private property. I cannot steal something from you if you do not own it. Furthermore, in the Decalogue, we ever have the command, "*Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house or anything that is thy neighbor's.*" Again, a clear teaching of private property. But let us come to this passage in Acts, Chapter 5. Is private property repudiated or is it taught? Notice what Peter said to Ananias: "*While this property remained, was it not thine own?*" It is difficult for me to imagine any clearer statement of the ownership of property than that! While it remained... Before you sold it... Was it not your own?... Did you not own it?... Could you not do with it whatever you will? Even after you sold it, was not the money your own? he says, showing him that he even had the control of that which he had earned in the sale. So we see that the Bible clearly teaches the right of private property because God has given the whole world unto mankind as a stewardship which is his to use and for which he is responsible to God.

Secondly, we note that this action was voluntary. They did not *have* to sell their property. There was no commandment to sell it. There was no commandment to give the funds away but they decided to do it. There was great grace upon them and being so overwhelmed by the grace of God working mightily in their hearts, they did this out of the abundance of their concern. It was voluntarism. I cannot imagine anything that militates more strongly against modern concepts of socialism than voluntarism. I have not the slightest objection to any group of people anywhere who want to get together and voluntarily engage in any form of socialism if they care to. But it is the fact of enforcement; it is the fact of coercion that lies at the very heart of every socialistic scheme in modern

centuries.

The great theologian, Charles Hodge, former Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton, says that heaven is not higher than the lower parts of the earth, than were the aims and purposes of the early Christians from the schemes of modern adherents to socialism and communism.

Thirdly, consider the disposition of the money. They sold the property and they brought the money and laid it... at the feet of Pontius Pilate? Was that correct? They laid it at the feet of Caesar? Was that correct? They brought it to the local tax collector? Was that correct? No! The Bible says, "*They laid it at the apostles' feet.*" It says a number of times: "*They laid it at the apostles' feet!*" I can think of nothing more perfectly designed to give Karl Marx apoplexy than the idea that people should sell all their property and give the money to the church. If there is anything antithetical to the whole spirit of modern socialism it is precisely that. And yet, people have the incredible temerity to say that this passage in Acts teaches modern state socialism. Nothing, indeed, can be farther from the truth.

Lastly, we might point out that this spontaneous outburst that took place in Jerusalem—the giving and holding of things in common—was never repeated anywhere else. Nor was it ever commanded by God. Indeed, it seems that it was economically not very successful. The Book of Acts shows that Paul repeatedly sought offerings throughout the Roman Empire to bring to the poor saints in Jerusalem. There have been those who speculated that by this socialistic endeavor they apparently impoverished or bankrupted themselves for the next half century.

Again, to quote Hodge:

The conditions of the success of this plan, on any large scale, cannot be found on earth... It supposes that men will labour as assiduously without the stimulus of the desire to improve their condition to secure the welfare of their families as with it. It supposes absolute disinterestedness on the part of the more wealthy, the stronger, or the more able members of the community. They must be willing to forego all personal advantages from their superior endowments. It supposes perfect integrity on the part of the distributors of the common fund, and a spirit of moderation and contentment in each member of the community, to be satisfied with what others, and not he, may think to be his equitable share... The attempt to introduce a general community of goods in the present state of the world, instead of elevating the poor, would reduce the whole mass of society to a common level of barbarism and poverty.

That is a pretty strong statement! Is it true? Would it or would it not? Well, we have seen in America a perfect, almost laboratory, experiment of finding out whether or not this is true. Many people do not realize that America, the land of the free enterprise system, began with socialism. Were you aware of that fact? If not, then I commend to you the reading of Governor William Bradford's account of the story of Plymouth Plantation. The pilgrims who landed at Plymouth and the leaders devised a scheme which was nothing other than a socialistic scheme perpetrated by Christians who were misinformed. Though they had benevolent ideas, these benevolent ideas were found to be disastrous to the community. They

maintained that all things would be held in common; that people would work for the common good and that this would produce great happiness and satisfaction and prosperity.

This was in 1620 when they landed. The result was a tremendous crop failure in the first year, a most exiguous and meager production. Many people were hungry; many were starving. In spite of the needs of the people and the fact that many had already died from hunger, starvation and disease, the following year another poor crop developed. By that time half of the Plymouth population had died. Therefore, in 1623 Governor Bradford declared that henceforth this experiment in a community of goods, a socialistic experiment, would be abandoned. Every man would receive a parcel of land for his own. He would work it and take care of his own family. The result: People went to work with alacrity. Men who had feigned sickness were now eager to get into the fields. Even the women went out to work eagerly, whereas before, the idea that the women should be told to work in the fields was thought to be the greatest tyranny. They took their children with them and happily engaged in labor for the benefit of their own family. The result was that the following harvest was a tremendous bountiful harvest and the first Thanksgiving was celebrated in America.

Note it well, my friends: When socialism was abandoned, thanksgiving was established! When socialism is reestablished in America, thanksgiving will be abolished! That is the history of America—a lesson that we have all too easily forgotten.

The French philosopher, Alexis de Tocqueville, who came here in the 1830s, in writing about

democracy in America, made this very penetrating observation. He said that America would last until *the people discovered that they could vote for themselves largess out of the public treasury.* Unfortunately, many people do not even know what 'largess' is, having progressed so far above those who lived a hundred and fifty years ago! I will say for those who do not know, that it means "benefits for yourself." My friends, have the American people learned that they can vote for themselves benefits out of the public treasury? They have learned it with a vengeance! All you have to do is read the papers for the last three months and you will see that every effort made to curtail that largess has been met with a great howling outcry from some segment or another of the public which has its snout in the public trough.

America will last until the American people discover that they can vote for themselves largess out of the public treasury—and those people who have not discovered this are being told it eagerly by politicians who stand for nothing more than reelection. They are eagerly pandering to the desires of the people that the government would give them yet more and more and more. The result of this, said de Tocqueville, will be the destruction of American civilization. My friends, we are far advanced down that road today—farther along than most people realize.

What are the adverse effects of this plunge into socialism as it relates to the teachings of the Word of God? First of all, I might say that one of the adverse effects is the breakdown of the family, the basic unit of any civilization. As goes the family so goes the nation. I do not know of anything more pernicious for the family life than the concept of a state welfare system. Ties that have for centuries bound the

generations together have been completely severed. Can you imagine anything more ludicrous than the Waltons on welfare?

There is a need which the Bible addresses for the care of people who cannot care for themselves. The care of infants and children; the care of the elderly; the care of the infirm and the sick and those who are unable to care for themselves. But in the Scripture that responsibility ever devolves upon the individual and the family and the church. Never on the state! But we have thrown off that responsibility and cast it upon the state. We have broken the bonds that bind the family together and we have gone a long way toward destruction of the basic unit of civilization in America. The Bible says, "*But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel* (2 Timothy 5:8). I think that Christian America needs to hear that very clearly today.

Secondly, socialism and the welfare state bring about a breakdown in the church. It has been seen in one country after another that where socialism goes up, the spiritual life in the church goes down. What happened in Russia with the closing of tens of thousands of churches? What has happened even in the non-communist countries where socialism has been rampant, such as Sweden or Great Britain, where spiritual life has dropped to almost zero? What has happened in Europe where no more than five percent of the people attend church on any given Sunday and spiritual life is at an all-time low? If you look at the laws existing in Sweden you will see all sorts of socialist laws hindering the work of the church of Jesus Christ.

If the state is to control the means of production, then the question has to be asked: What does the state feel should be done with its basic resources? Will it use its wood and concrete for the building of churches? Will that be high on their priority list? Will they use their paper for the printing of Bibles? Will they take their time to train pastors and evangelists? Look at any socialist state and get a clear answer to those questions.

Thirdly, there is a breakdown in Christian charity. The great vision given in the Bible of private charity is destroyed. One thing we ought to understand is that there is no moral or spiritual merit involved in having someone coerce you at gunpoint, taking something away from you and giving it to someone else. Nobody has ever thought that the rich people Robin Hood robbed were somehow spiritually advancing in the act of having their goods confiscated and given to someone else. There must be the motivation of voluntary giving or else there is no spiritual aspect to the deed. Today the state takes such a large portion of the income of people that there is little left for private charity in our country.

Fourthly, there is an adverse effect upon the recipients themselves. I think there are no greater victims of the welfare system than the welfare recipients. I believe that we, as Christians, need to perceive the fact that these people are being spiritually and financially destroyed by the welfare system. God has declared that this life is simply a proving ground, a testing ground for eternity. How we live our lives here—including fulfilling the cultural mandate of God to till the earth, to work, and do the things God has given us to do as His stewards, for which we will be responsible—will greatly affect how we are seen

in the eyes of God. The Bible clearly says that if any will not work, then let him not eat because God has created us for the purpose of working.

In a welfare system there are millions of people who have had the need to work removed from them. This number is increasing almost geometrically. Today there are seventy million Americans receiving money from the federal government. These are in all different kinds of categories. Seventy million! The question I would like to ask is: Do all these people have to have this money? This program has developed astronomically in the last ten years. How did we ever get along without it?

I would like to point to an experiment that was tried in the last several years in Illinois called "workfare." All recipients of welfare were sent a letter saying that if anybody was an able-bodied person and did not have children under six to care for and was on welfare, that person would have to perform some job in the public sector in order to continue to receive welfare payments. Whether it was sorting cards in the library, working in a daycare center, or mowing grass along the highways, something must be done for the well-being of the community which was giving him the money. Fifty percent of the people did not even bother to come in to talk about it even though they were told their payments would be cut off on the first of the next month. Ultimately, ninety percent of all the welfare recipients refused to take a job six hours a day in order to continue to get their welfare payments and ninety percent of the people on the rolls were removed. Seventy million people today are receiving money to the tune of \$368 billion a year and the tragedy is that many of these people are perpetuated in their poverty. The system in America

which would enable people to have upward mobility is being cut off for these people. They are a perpetuated people, generation after generation, who have never learned to work and will never be anything other than simply recipients of welfare. What this is doing to them spiritually is incalculable! How can a person possibly live a spiritual life before a God who has commanded him to work when all he does is receive welfare.

Fifthly, there are adverse effects upon the people in the country who are producing the income. Obviously, as those who receive welfare have their initiative and desire to work removed, those who are giving the money to this cause find that their initiative is also diminished. I talked to people in September who told me that if they work anymore this year the government will take almost all they make, and so they are not even working. You see what that does to the productivity of the nation? It drops dramatically! As taxes have gone up and up in this welfare state, as more and more money is being given away, productivity of the nation declines. Do you know what the result of that is? Inflation!

There are two causes of inflation. One is the government printing too much money and the other is too little productivity. When there is too much money chasing too little goods and services, inflation is the inevitable result. If the productivity of America were increased ten percent, inflation would disappear. But that will not happen where the motivation to produce is being destroyed on the part of the recipients who do not have to work, and on the part of the givers who find that an increasingly large percent of their income is being taken away. May I say that this is becoming startling! Last month the Commerce

Department released these figures: Total taxes in the United States [federal, state and local] have now gone from \$289.8 billion in 1970 to \$804.3 billion in 1980. That amounts to \$3,533 per person, or for a family of four, over \$14,000, which amounts to 60% of all the wages of the workers in America. Sixty percent of every dollar of wages that you earn goes to taxes—either those which are seen or those which are hidden. That is incredible!

The entire wealth of the nation is being confiscated by a government which is also producing all sorts of other adverse spiritual effects in our nation. Even more, we might point out that this lessens the ability of the entire nation even to survive! Today we find that, confronted with a tremendous military buildup on the part of the Soviet Union, we cannot find the money to even provide an adequate defense of the United States. Why? Because we are giving away \$368 billion. We do not have the funds to do it and we may, as a result, bring about the annihilation of American society.

No, the Bible does not teach socialism! The adverse effects of it, in the long haul, are incalculable. What the Bible teaches is freedom and responsibility and work, and yet we are jettisoning all of these in the socialistic state. The spiritual effects will be the worst in the end.

People get things completely turned upside down. Many have lost the Biblical concepts of working to earn their daily bread. Yet they have also obtained the erroneous concept that somehow they can get eternal life by working. The Bible teaches that we are to work for the things of this life but that we could never earn eternal life. That and that alone is free!

The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord because He alone had enough to pay for it all. That, my friends, is free!

There may be no free lunch in this world, but thank God the marriage feast of the Lamb is free and paid for by Christ at an incredible cost from the cross at Calvary and is offered to all those who will place their trust in Him and receive Him into their heart as Saviour and Lord. When they do that, they will see that this life is a probation. They are called upon by God to work and to produce and to fulfill their probation so that they may hear the Word of God saying, "*Well done, thou good and faithful servant.*"

PRAYER: Father, open our eyes to the truths that are laid down in the principles of Thy Word that we may not be led astray by those who would pander to the evil propensities of the human heart. Help us to see that Thou hast given us, in Thy Word, principles and truths that govern every phase of our lives. May we not destroy the society that Thou hast given us and the hopes of our children, through the folly of men. May we be wise through Your Word. For we pray it in the name of Christ. Amen.

This is the complete unabridged sermon as delivered by Dr. D. James Kennedy at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida on October 18, 1981.