



In recent years, no word has garnered more attention in American politics than this word: socialism. And, when in discussions with someone who knows I am a Christian, one of the assertions often leveled at me is this; Jesus was a socialist.

Now, I try to keep politics out of this site as much as possible. Christianity does not belong to any one political party. My goal here isn't to speak my political opinions, but to make Ambassadors For Christ. With that said, aligning Jesus with a political ideology makes this a topic relevant to this site and one I am happy to discuss.

What Is Socialism?

Before we look to see if Jesus was a socialist, we need to first understand what socialism is. Socialism as a movement began in earnest in 1848 when Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote *The Communist Manifesto*. There had been prior events and ideals in history that were the basis of the movement, but it did not get the name "socialism" until the late 1800s.

Socialism is a form of government. It places the concentration of power into the hands of the government in order to have central control of the economy and resources, and the radical redistribution of wealth. The government determines what gets made and how much of it gets made. All of the government's activities are funded by taxing the population.

One of the reasons socialists believe the government should be in control of resources is that they see the economy as one of finite resources. Think of a pie. In socialism, the size of that pie is set. It never gets bigger (whereas in free market economies, if there is no pie left, you are able to find a way to make more pie). So, because they see the resources as fixed, they view that someone needs to be in charge to make sure everyone gets the same as everyone else.

Because socialism sees the assets of the world as fixed, it views that if someone has more than someone else, that is unfair. They must have done something bad - or broke the rules - to have more than you. Socialism attempts to make everything fair by paying everyone the same wage for the same job no matter how good or bad you are at your job. So, the guy who is 3 times as productive as another guy gets the same wage with no room for a raise - even though he might work harder.

One way socialism is promoted is that the government is giving away "free" things - like healthcare, and food, and education. But, this is incorrect. These resources aren't free. A hospital doesn't decide that it will provide it's services without pay. The services are paid for by the government. And, the main way a government gets its money to pay for things is



through taxes. So, when you hear the word “free” associated with anything a government does, substitute “free” with “tax payer funded” and you will have a better picture of how the process works.

Why Do People Think Jesus Was A Socialist?

Socialism usually starts out as a “movement for the poor and working man”. It sees those who have more as greedy and dishonest. It proposes that because they have more, they must not care about others. Otherwise, they would give all they had to make things equal. They must have more because they love money more than helping their fellow human being.

Some of this sounds a lot like what Jesus taught. He warned his followers that the love of money was wrong (Matthew 6:24, Luke 12:15). Making money your god leads you down a bad path. And, when someone with money came to him and asked what they had to do to get into heaven he said: “sell everything you have and give it to the poor”. (Matthew 19:21)

Another passage people will cite when aligning Jesus with socialism comes in Matthew 22:21 and Mark 12:17. Someone asks him if they should pay taxes to Rome and he says “render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and unto God what is God’s”. This sounds pretty pro-government, doesn’t it? If the government asks for taxes, pay them whatever they ask for.

Finally, there is the scene in the gospels where Jesus kicks the money changers and sacrifice sellers out of the temple (Matthew 21:12-17, Mark 11:15-19, Luke 19:45-48, John 2:13-16). He becomes angry, starts flipping tables over and chases livestock out of the courtyard. It’s as if he is literally delivering a blow to commerce and free trade.

Was Jesus A Socialist?

Socialism is marketed to us as the way to best care for the poor, reduce greed, and make things “fair”. Well, Jesus certainly advocated for caring for the poor and less fortunate. And he warned us against the love of money and possessions. But, that’s where the similarities end. Remember, socialism is a form of government. And, as we’ll see, Jesus never gets behind *any* form of government, per se.

Let’s begin by looking at those same passages we used above. First off - money and possessions. Jesus didn’t say that money was bad; he said the *love* of money was bad. Money and possessions are not bad in and of themselves. It’s what you did to get them and what you do with them that matters. If you are talented enough to earn millions of dollars, and then turn around and finance the education of kids who are unable to pay for college, *that’s*



a good thing! If you made lots of money, own lots of lands, and develop some sort of place where your community can come and enjoy the outdoors, that's a *good* thing. So, as long as you obtained your wealth through moral practices, you use your gifts for the betterment of mankind, and you haven't made the collection of things your life's goal - we have no problem here.

Next, let's look at Jesus' comments on taxes. In this case, I'm going to cite one of my favorite apologists, Greg Koukl, who frequently says "never read a Bible verse". What he means by that is we should never take a verse by itself. In order to understand what it means, you have to read the verses before and after it to get its full meaning. In the passage where Jesus says to "render unto Caesar what is Caesar's", the Pharisees are trying to trap Jesus into either aligning with the Romans (and upsetting the Jews) or with the Jews (and upsetting the Roman authorities). Jesus' answer tells them yes, there are certain things that the government oversees, and certain aspects of our lives that belong to God. If anything, this verse demonstrates a separation of church and state. But, nowhere does it imply that Jesus was advocating for the government to levy heavy taxes against its citizens to pay for social programs.

Lastly, let's look at the scene in the temple courtyard. Jesus wasn't mad at the institution of money changing or selling of livestock; he was upset at where it was being done. He didn't go into the regular marketplace and upset any carts, or go after any money changers. He was mad that these merchants were doing business at a house of prayer and using a holy act (repentance and giving) as the means to make money.

Jesus Was For Personal Sovereignty

Now, let's look at a few examples in Scripture where Jesus addresses the idea of ownership of ones resources (money) and our rights to choose what to do with them

Luke 12:13 begins a section known as the Parable of The Rich Fool. It begins with someone shouting out "teacher tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me". Jesus warns the man to beware of covetousness; to not be envious. His brother had more than him and he thought it wasn't fair. He wanted some of what his brother had. That's envy. Envy is the basis of socialism. If someone has more than someone else, then that's not fair. They must have done something unjust to get it. Socialism says "that guy has more than us and that's not fair. He should divide up what is his and give it to the rest of us". That's covetousness.

The second example is found in Matthew 20:1-15 and is known as the Parable of the Workers In The Vineyard. In it, a man needs laborers to work in his vineyard. He hires some



men in the morning and tells them he will pay them a day's wage. A few hours more, he realizes he needs more men, so he finds more and offers them the same wage. As the day goes on, he needs more and more men in order to get the work done. He offers each of them a full day's wage even though they only have to work a couple of hours. When the day is over, and the man is paying the workers their wages, the men who started working first are upset. "Hey! They worked less than us and got the same amount of money. That's not fair!". The man responds "Oh? Did I give you the wage you were promised? (yes) Don't I have the right to do with my money as I see fit?"

In this parable, Jesus demonstrates that if we agree to be paid a certain wage, as long as we get what was agreed to, we have nothing to gripe about or be jealous/envious of. And the person who owns the funds with which we get paid has the right to distribute them as they see fit. Because it's their money. They have sovereignty over their possessions. And, as long as they live up to their agreements, then it's all good. If we cry out "hey! That's not fair!" then that is us being covetous and jealous of what someone else has received.

Jesus on Social Responsibility

Jesus certainly advocated for us to take care of one another, to care for those less fortunate than us, to treat each other equally, and to not be greedy. All of these sound like very socialist concepts. The difference is that Jesus wants *me personally* to do these things. Not the government. He wants *me personally* to help out my neighbor with funds and my resources if he or she is in need. He wants *me personally* to care for my mom if she gets sick. He wants *me personally* to donate money or food to the food bank to feed those in need. If I am blessed with wealth, he wants *me personally* to keep what I need to support my family and use the rest for the betterment of my community.

See the difference? Jesus wants our care for one another to be on a personal level. He never advocated for the government to take our money to do it for us. Jesus wants our giving to be done cheerfully and voluntarily. Because we want to. Not through coercion. Otherwise, our being charitable is a lie. We are giving up our money and letting somebody *else* do the work for us. If I give money to the government to pay for some homeless program, there will be a disconnect between me and the homeless people it will help. That personal interaction will be removed.

Now, you may think that donating money to charity or paying taxes to the government are the same if the money ends up in the same place. But, it's not. When we pay our taxes we pay for all of the programs all at once. We have no idea what percentage of what we give to the government goes where. But, if I write a check to the local food bank, I know exactly



what I am giving to them. It's still a personal connection.

In the end, people who say Jesus was a socialist are doing so based only on a handful of verses that seem to fit their needs. It is only by looking at the broader picture of Jesus' teachings that we get His complete message. Yes, He wants us to care for those who are less fortunate. But, He wants each of us to do that on a personal level. He doesn't want us to pass the responsibility off on someone else. And, absolutely nowhere does He advocate that the government should do it for us.

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