

Biblical Principles of Labor

Psalm 8

Francis Schaeffer reminded us that Christianity doesn't begin with Jesus died for our sins. It begins with God created the heavens and the earth. Christianity is a worldview that teaches people about reality and how to fruitfully live in every direction that life takes us. A Biblical worldview not only outlines how things are, but also deals with how things ought to be. And because this is Labor Day weekend, which is a yearly tribute to the contributions of workers and businesses to the well-being of our nation, I want to share some Biblical principles concerning labor and economics. I do this in order to remind you of how things **ought to be**. These principles come from Dr. Del Tackett, in the DVD series "The Truth Project".

In a book entitled **The Poverty of Nations**, the Christian authors, both with PhD's, call upon pastors to teach what the Bible says about economics, and to repent for not doing it in the first place. The Coalition on Revival, made up of over a hundred Christian scholars, agrees and has written 18 Articles concerning Biblical guidelines on economics. Listen to Article 15,

"We affirm that it is the responsibility of the Church to teach the fundamental principles of Biblical economics and to equip its people to discern between Biblical and un-Biblical economic activities and systems. **We deny** that the learning of, or practice of, Biblical economics is optional to the Christian, or that the ministry of the Church may be deemed successful without diligent training of its people in Biblical economics."

We are going to condense their 18 Articles into 7. Our Scripture text for this morning is Psalm 8, which gives us our first two Biblical principles of labor, and since labor is the driving force of economics, these principles apply to economics as well. I am going to focus on verses 3-9, but will start with verses 3-4. King David writes,

"When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place [our God is a working God. And when David pondered the size and scope of God's handiwork, it caused him to contemplate the following question],⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? [son of man is another way of referring to mankind].

David felt very small and humble when he looked at God's creation, and that is a good attitude to have. What do these verses teach concerning the right way to think about labor and economics? It tells us that **God made everything and therefore everything belongs to God** [also see Psalm 24:1]. Since man was also created by God, our labor should be done in a way that honors our Creator. This is why the Apostle Paul teaches in **Colossians 3:23**, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord."

The second principle of labor is found in verses 5-9,

"You made him [man] a little lower than the heavenly beings [angels can live in God's very presence. The bodies we have now cannot see God and live] and crowned him with glory and honor. 6 You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: 7 all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, 8 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. 9 O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"

The second principle of labor is that of all of God's earthly creation, only man is made in God's image, and only man has been given stewardship responsibilities over the earth. Since this earth and everything **on it** and **in it** belongs to God, then people should be good stewards of God's belongings. **Genesis 1:27-31** speaks to this very issue,

“So God created man in his own image . . . male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it’” [one of the ideas behind the word subdue, is to discover and use the resources God has placed upon the earth – in ways that enrich life for all].

Sin has marred the image of God in man, but it has not obliterated it. This means that good stewardship is more difficult – but even in our fallen condition, by means of common grace, man can make gardens in the wilderness; we can forge glass from sand and make cell phones from silicon; we can catch fish to feed ourselves – and build boats to catch even more fish. And because so many people need fish for food, we build warehouses to clean and pack those fish – and shipping industries to get the fish to the people who want them. Honest and productive labor, which makes good use of God's resources, is wise stewardship that honors God.

The third principle of labor is: **Theft of another's goods is wrong.** The Moral Law of God, which is for all people of all time, tells us in the 8th Commandment, “You shall not steal.” Why? Because our neighbor has ownership rights over that which God has entrusted to him. In other words, the 8th Commandment establishes the right of private property. And of all the economic systems operating in the world today, the free market system most respects the right of private property and enables the most people to enjoy that right. The 10th Commandment echos the right of private property, “You shall not covet your neighbor's house . . . nor anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

Those two commandments destroy the economic system known as Socialism, which believes that private property is the root of all evil, and therefore civil government should be in charge of labor and property. Friends, either God's commandments are right or Socialism is right, but both of them cannot be right. Karl Marx, who is known as the father of Socialism, boldly put this statement into writing, “My object in life is to dethrone God and destroy capitalism.” Today we have millions of Americans [including Christians] enamored with Socialism and quite ignorant about God's principles of economics.

The fourth Biblical principle of Labor is: **Skills and abilities to work come from God.** The Apostle Paul states it this way, “What do you have that you did not receive?” The answer is nothing – every good thing we have is from God. Look with me at **Exodus 35:30-33**,

“Then Moses said to the Israelites, ‘See, the LORD has chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, 31 and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts – 32 to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, 33 to cut and set stones, to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of artistic craftsmanship.’”

Bezalel was gifted by God to do that work. Most of Israel was not. Each of us have different gifts and talents. Which is why each of us must seek to discover what our gifts and talents are. Mark Twain said “The two most important days in your life are the day you born and the day you find out why.” Let me be clear. Our primary call from God is to follow Jesus and obey His

commands. Our secondary call is to serve our fellow man with the gifts and abilities God has given us. Listen to **Romans 12:6-8**,

“We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is . . . 7 serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; 8 if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.”

The free market system is patterned after the truth of spiritual gifts. Christians are happiest and most fulfilled when we are using our spiritual gifts in behalf of others. The free market system says that whatever your passion is in life, if you can use it to provide honest service to people – who value what you do so much that they are willing to pay you to do it – then everyone gains.

When our founding fathers said that all men are created equal, they were not saying that all men have the same level of abilities or gifts. They were saying that all men have the God-given right of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness [the right to own property].

The fifth principle of labor is: **Work is profitable, good and to be pursued; laziness is not.** **Deuteronomy 8:18** says, “But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.” To make a profit from our labors is not evil. Jesus said, “The workman deserves his wages.” A person is not a dirty capitalist because he wants to earn money. A dirty capitalist is one who cheats and defrauds people while pretending he is serving them with his labor. In **Micah 6:10-11**, God speaks about one of Israel’s sins that was going to bring His judgment upon them,

“Am I . . . to forget, O wicked house, your ill-gotten treasures and the short ephah [those who sold grain were shorting people of a full ephah of grain], which is accursed? 11 Shall I acquit a man with dishonest scales, with a bag of false weights?”

God hates dishonesty in business. He tells us in **Proverbs 16:11**, “Honest scales and balances are from the LORD; all the weights in the bag are of his making.” God has also made provisions to curb dishonest capitalists. **Proverbs 16:12**, “Kings detest wrongdoing, for a throne is established through righteousness.” When capitalists cheat and defraud people, civil government is to protect the law abiding from the law breaker. A king who does not detest wrong doing is an abomination to God.

The sixth principle of labor is: **Love God and not your goods.** The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. That is another characteristic of dirty capitalism. But friends, honest capitalism, and the free market system have been and continues to be a wonderful blessing upon the earth. The free market system creates jobs and opportunities for people to use their gifts in helping others and in providing for their families.

In 1776, Adam Smith, regarded as the father of economics, wrote a book entitled, **An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations**. It is one of the most influential books ever written. He showed that free trade among nations will profit all those involved – and that a society will prosper best economically if its economy is not controlled by civil government. Freedom and self-interest in the market place, will not bring chaos but prosperity – because self-interest includes the necessity to protect one’s neighbor and deal fairly with him since one’s own welfare is bound up in the welfare of his neighbor. Self-interest, provided there is open competition and no coercion, is a force for good – just as washing our hands before we eat and looking both ways before we cross the street.

Taking off from the conclusions of Adam Smith's book on the wealth of nations, the Christian authors of **The Poverty of Nations**, show that countries which practice the free market system are growing their economies. Nations with civil leaders who practice excessive control over the market place, do not experience economic growth, but invariably decline. And the countries that make it difficult if not impossible for citizens to own land, are the poorest of the poor.

Let me put it bluntly: Socialism never works for the long haul. Communism is Socialism on steroids, which makes it even worse. And welfare nations that promote entitlement mentalities are just doing Socialism light. So is practicing just a little bit of Socialism a good thing? Let me remind you that rat poison is 98% corn meal. Is that little 2% that kills them.

The seventh and last principle of labor is: **Be compassionate and generous with your goods to those in need.** Generosity cannot be forced; it cannot be legislated by civil government. Generosity must come from the free will and desire of the person who gives it. Civil government can do something about people who steal – they can apprehend and force them to make restitution to those they have stolen from. **But civil government cannot force people to be generous without being guilty of stealing from the people they are forcing to be generous.** Stealing is wrong, even when civil leaders do it.

If I was to point to one place in Scripture that best illustrates the Biblical principles of labor and economics, I would choose Proverbs 31:10-31,

“A wife of noble character . . . is worth far more than rubies . . . 13 She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands [she believes work is good] . . . 15 She gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family and portions for her servant girls [whom she is teaching a good work ethic and skills that enable them to earn money]. 16 She considers a field and buys it [countries that do not allow that – suffer poverty]; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard [in many Muslim countries women are repressed in the market place] . . . 18 She sees that her trading is profitable [profits are not bad, they are good] . . . 20 She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy [she does that out of love and generosity, not by government compulsion]. 21 When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet. 22 She makes coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple [she is enjoying the fruits of her labors as well as being generous to others. Those are not mutually exclusive activities]. 23 Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land [he voluntarily serves his community as a civil leader, helping to maintain justice and order]. 24 She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes [she is involved in trading with people outside her own borders, which stimulates those economies as well]. 25 She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come [she doesn't need civil government to provide her with social security checks when she gets old. She takes that responsibility herself]. 26 She speaks with wisdom [which always begins with the fear of God and a deep respect for His laws] and faithful instruction is on her tongue [she is willing to bless others with the truths she has learned and lived by]. 27 She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness [welfare checks breed idleness] . . . 31 Give her the reward she has earned [which means civil leaders need to keep their sticky little fingers off of her wealth. The poor are best helped in a face to face way by people who choose to help them with money they have earned].

Some of you are thinking, “But pastor Mark, unbelievers are not going to respect God’s laws concerning labor and economics.” That is not what the Bible says. Listen to what Moses tells the nation of Israel in **Deuteronomy 4:5-6**,

“See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me . . . 6 Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations [referring to unbelievers], who will hear about all these decrees and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’”

Let me close by reading a quote from a pastor named Adrian Rogers, who was born in 1931 and died in 2005:

“You cannot legislate the poor **into prosperity** by legislating the wealthy **out of prosperity**. What one person receives without working for, another person must work for without receiving. The government cannot **give** to anybody – anything that the government does not first **take** from somebody else. When half of the people get the idea they do not have to work because the other half is going to take care of them, and when the other half gets the idea that it does no good to work because somebody else is going to get what they work for – that my dear friends, is the beginning of the end of any nation. You cannot multiply wealth by dividing it.”

Illinois and nine other states, now have more people on welfare, than people who are working. Let’s pray.