

## **Biblical Guidelines For Civil Government and Economics**

Pastor Mark Alvis

A recent graduate of a worldview conference summarized what she learned as follows: “A Biblical Worldview is all encompassing. It is able to positively affect every area of culture, every occupation, every area of life so far as we allow it.”

**Francis Schaefer** correctly stated, “Christianity does not start with Jesus died for your sins. It starts with – ‘In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.’” God created everything – mankind [male and female], marriage, the family, the need for work, trade, economics, civil government, etc.

**John Stott** writes: “Many people are rejecting our gospel today not because they perceive it to be false, but because they perceive it to be trivial. People are looking for an integrated worldview which makes sense of all their experience.” Sometimes churches do a good job in teaching people how to get saved, but they do a poor job in teaching saved people how to live in every direction that life takes us.

An esteemed British scientist commented on the fact “There are astonishing and complex laws that govern stars and galaxies – billions of miles away from planet earth. It is not surprising that these laws exist; what is surprising is that man can understand them.” In my mind, if mankind can understand and be in awe of God’s laws that govern stars and galaxies, we ought to be able to understand and honor God’s laws concerning civil government and economics. Is that an unreasonable deduction? Many Christians act as if God has not spoken to these issues. And that is the fault of local churches.

It hasn’t always been this way. Four hundred years ago both the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Savoy Declaration of Faith taught that civil governments will rise or fall according to how they align themselves with the Bible. Christians were expected to know, embrace and articulate that truth.

**The Coalition on Revival** is made up of over a hundred Christian scholars from a broad spectrum of evangelical denominations. Listen to their convictions about civil government. **We affirm** that God, in the Bible, teaches principles related to man's civic responsibilities and rights, and that these precepts apply to all men, Christian and non-Christian. **We deny** that man is morally free to govern or enact laws at variance with the truth in the Bible. **We affirm** that civil government will function most beneficially for all citizens when it is based on Biblical principles. **We deny** that there are principles superior to those found in the . . . Bible on which civil government and civilization may be founded.

I have often heard Christians say that we cannot expect unbelievers to respect what the Bible says on these matters. The Bible does not agree with that assessment. In **Deuteronomy 4:5-8**, Moses told the newly formed nation of Israel,

“See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me [to help the people of Israel live together in a peaceful, orderly way] . . . <sup>6</sup> Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations [unbelievers], who will hear about all these decrees and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people’ . . . <sup>8</sup> ‘What other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?’”

**The Coalition on Revival** goes on to say concerning economics, “**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.”

And so let's look at **Seven Biblical Principles of Labor**, which should guide economic systems [this is taken from The Truth Project by Dr. Del Tackett].

(1) Any study of Biblical economics must begin with the truth that **all things belong to God**. **Psalm 24:1**, “The earth is the LORD’S, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.” God made it and it all belongs to Him and should glorify Him.

(2) Of all of God’s creatures, only man has been given stewardship responsibilities over the earth. **Psalm 8:5-6**, declares, “You made him [mankind] a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. <sup>6</sup> You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet.” This is why we can understand laws the govern galaxies.

**Genesis 1:27-31**, “So God created man in his own image . . . male and female he created them. <sup>28</sup> God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number [requires a marriage between a man and a woman]; 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. Therefore, mankind is still obligated to be a good steward over God’s creation. To use it but not abuse it.

Our sinfulness has made this more difficult, but because of God’s common grace, man can make gardens in the wilderness, glass out of sand, and cell phones from silicon. We can catch fish to feed ourselves – and build boats to catch more fish than we can personally eat – and therefore build warehouses to clean and pack those fish – and shipping industries to get the fish to people who want and need them. Using our time and abilities in honest ways to meet the needs and desires of people is the bedrock of capitalism and the free market system.

(3) **Theft of another’s goods is wrong**. **Exodus 20:15**, [the Eighth Commandment says] “You shall not steal.” **Leviticus 19:13**, “You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him.” How many of you would say you do a good job on those commandments? What do you think of the

proposal of 70% taxes upon the wealthy? If that excites you, then don't think you are doing well on those commands. **The Eighth Commandment establishes the right of private property.** There is no economic system that respects the right of private property more than Free Market Capitalism.

If a person steals what belongs to another, civil government has the **authority and responsibility** to punish the thief after his crime has been proven [Romans 13:3-4]. By the way, if all wealthy people are dishonest thieves [as some politicians are declaring], then we should fire our civil leaders for not carrying out their God-given task.

The Tenth Commandment says, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house . . . or . . . anything that belongs to your neighbor." The commandments not to steal or covet – destroy the economic, governmental system known as Socialism. Socialism, in its purest form, believes that ownership of private property – is the root of all evil – therefore the ownership of property and distribution of wealth should be in the hands of Civil Government.

Question: Is it the ownership of property that causes people to covet and steal, or is it the evil in peoples' hearts? Jesus said it is a heart issue. This is why the most important government in the Bible, is the self-government of individuals, who have a responsibility to align themselves under God's Moral Law. Our form of limited civil government cannot work without citizens of high moral fiber who embrace God's standards of right and wrong. "Morality is simply having the character to do what you should do, instead of what you have the freedom to do." "Freedom and Free Enterprise are simply the fruit on the tree of morality."

We are faced with a clear choice: Either the Eighth Commandment [which establishes the right of private property] is correct – or Socialism is correct, but both cannot be right. As I have said, Socialism maintains that the fruit of man's labors should be put into a common purse and equally divided by the Civil Government. Listen to what God thinks of that idea in **Proverbs 1:10-15**,

“My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them. <sup>11</sup> If they say, ‘Come along with us . . . let’s waylay some harmless soul . . . <sup>13</sup> we will get all sorts of valuable things and fill our houses with plunder; <sup>14</sup> throw in your lot with us and we will share a common purse.’ <sup>15</sup> my son, do not go along with them . . . .”

I hope we all agree that plundering and stealing from others is wrong. Listen to what **Frederic Bastiat**, a Christian French economist, wrote about plunder in 1850. He gave these warnings specifically to his fellow Europeans, who were widely embracing Socialism as a governing and economic system. He wrote these warnings with urgency, because of his study of God’s Word and because he knew he was dying from a disease which would shortly end his physical life,

“**There are two kinds of plunder: legal and illegal . . .** The war against illegal plunder [robbery] has been fought since the beginning of the world . . . The law [civil government] itself conducts this war, and it is my wish and opinion that the law should always maintain this attitude toward plunder. But it does not always do this. Sometimes the law defends plunder and participates in it [he is speaking of socialistic civil government]. Thus the beneficiaries are spared the shame, danger and scruple, which their acts would otherwise involve.” [this is what makes legal plunder far more dangerous than illegal plunder].

“**How to identify legal plunder.** Quite simply. See if the law takes from some persons, what belongs to them, and gives it to other persons to whom it does not belong. See if the law benefits one citizen at the expense of another by doing what the citizen himself cannot do without committing a crime . . . If such a law – which may be an isolated case – is not abolished immediately, it will spread, multiply, and develop into a system . . . Now legal plunder can be committed in an infinite number of ways. Thus we have an infinite number of plans for organizing it: [I think you will be surprised by what he mentions in 1850] . . . progressive taxation, public schools, minimum wages, right to relief [welfare] . . . and so on. All these plans . . . with their common aim of legal plunder – constitute socialism.”

“The question of legal plunder must be settled once for all, and there are only three ways to settle it: 1) The few plunder the many [Civil Government does the plundering]. 2) Everybody plunders everybody [might makes right]. 3) Nobody plunders anybody” [which happens when Biblical principles of civil government and economics are followed].

**II Samuel 8:15**, “David reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people.” Was anybody being plundered under David’s rule? How did David do it? By following God’s blueprint for civil government and economics [Deuteronomy 17:18-20].

Today we have millions of Americans [including Christians] enamored with Socialism and clueless about God’s principles of civil government and economics. That is primarily the fault of local churches. Karl Marx wrote that his objective in life was to dethrone God and destroy capitalism

**4. Skills and abilities to work come from God.** The Apostle Paul stated it this way, “What do you have that you did not receive?” Our primary calling in life is to follow Jesus and obey His commands. Our secondary calling 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 . . . <sup>7</sup> serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; <sup>8</sup> 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.” Mark Twain said, “The two most important days in a person’s life are: the day we were born – and the day we discover way.”

The free market system seeks to imitate spiritual gifts. Christians are happiest and most fulfilled when they are using their spiritual gifts for the benefit of others. The free market system says that if you can do what you love to do, and provide honest service to people – who value what you do so much that they are willing to pay you to do it – then everyone prospers. And even if you are not doing what you love to do, but you are doing it

well, it may eventually enable you to do what you love.

When our founding fathers said that all men are created equal, they were not indicating that all men have the same abilities and 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].

**5. 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.” The Apostle Paul declared that “If a man will not work, neither let him eat.” Work is good, laziness is not.

Hard work and honest profit are good. Dirty capitalism cheats and defrauds people. **Proverbs 16:11** states, “Honest scales and balances are from the LORD; all the weights in the bag are of his making.” God hates dishonesty and has made provisions to curb dishonest businesses and workers. **Proverbs 16:12**, “Kings detest wrongdoing, for a throne is established through righteousness.” If capitalists cheat and defraud people, civil government is to protect the innocent and punish the guilty. A king who does not detest wrong doing is not qualified to be a civil leader.

Listen to the qualifications for a civil leader, which are spelled out in **Exodus 18:21**, “But select **capable** men [women] from all the people – men who **fear God** [honor His Moral Law], **trustworthy** men who **hate dishonest gain** – and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.” [parallel passage in Deuteronomy 1:9-14]. Officials over tens and fifties would be far more numerous than officials over thousands. It was the official over tens and fifties, who would make up local civil government. They were unpaid elders who sat at the gate and helped to settle disputes between people [the husband of the noble wife of Proverbs 31, was an elder who sat at the village gate]. Civil officials had the authority to punish wrong doers – **which is why God gave Civil Laws – to help civil officials – administer fair and just punishment upon wrongdoers**. Listen to what the Apostle Paul writes in **I Timothy 1:8-11**,

“Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully,  
<sup>9</sup> understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers,  
<sup>10</sup> the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, <sup>11</sup> in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.”

The division of God’s Law that Paul is referring to in verses 9-11 is God’s Civil Law, which lays out fair and just punishments for lawbreakers.

At this point, let’s speak about the three purposes and divisions of God’s Law,

### **The Three Purposes and Divisions of God’s Law** Taken From The Geneva Study Bible

Scripture shows that God intends His law to function in three ways, which John Calvin crystalized in classic form for the church’s benefit . . . **The first function** of God’s Moral Law is to be a mirror reflecting to us both the perfect righteousness of God and our own sinfulness and shortcomings. As Augustine wrote, ‘the law bids us, as we try to fulfill its requirements, and become wearied in our weakness under it, to know how to ask the help of grace.’ God’s Moral Law is meant to give knowledge of sin [Romans 3:20], and thereby show our need of pardon through repentance and faith in Christ.

**A second function**, the ‘civil use,’ is to restrain evil. Though the law cannot change the heart, it can to some extent inhibit lawlessness by its threats of judgment, especially when backed by a civil code that administers punishments for proven offenses [Deuteronomy 19:16-21; Romans 13:3-4]. Thus it secures civil order, and serves to protect the righteous from the unjust.

**Its third function** is to guide the regenerate into the good works that God

has planned for them [Ephesians 2:10]. The Moral Law tells God's children what will please their heavenly Father. It could be called their family code. Christ was speaking of this third use of the law when He said that those who become His disciples must be taught to do all that He had commanded [Matthew 28:20]. Obedience to Christ's commands will prove the reality of one's love for Him [John 14:15].

The Christian is free from the Ceremonial Law. We do not need to offer animal sacrifices when we sin. That was a temporary provision by God until Christ made His perfect sacrifice for sin [Hebrews 10:1-2, 12]. Nor are Christians under the Ceremonial Laws of circumcision, kosher diet, feast days, washings, mixed clothing restrictions, etc. But the Christian is 'under law toward Christ' as a rule of life [I Corinthians 9:20-22]. The Apostle Paul's letter to the Galatians is focused on the truth that Christians are not under God's Ceremonial Law [Galatians 2:11-12; 3:24-25; 4:10-11; 5:1-2, 6]. We will never properly understand what the New Testament says about a Christian's relationship to God's Law – if we do not understand the threefold division of God's Law. The proper use of the law and the gospel compliment each other – they do not conflict.

**6. 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 honest capitalism, and the free market system have been a wonderful blessing. Socialism, on the other hand, never works in the long run. It always breaks down. The free market has lifted more people out of poverty than any other economic system. 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 exercise excessive control over the market place, do not experience economic growth, but invariably decline. The countries that make it difficult if not impossible for citizens to own land, are the poorest of the poor. Countries that are making it possible to own land in an orderly and honest way, are coming out of poverty as I speak.

**7. Be compassionate and generous with your goods to those in need.** Generosity cannot be forced or it ceases to be generosity.

If I was the devil, and I wanted to sabotage generosity in a nation, I would put civil government in charge of helping the poor. When civil government does it, they forcefully take money from some people – who worked to earn it, and give it to others – who did not work to earn it. Under this system, governing officials are not being generous to the poor because they did not earn the money they take from those who did. And those whose money has been taken from them – are not being generous, because it was forcefully taken from them [try not paying your taxes]. **Another problem is that the people who receive the money, are told they are entitled to it, and therefore do not learn gratitude. And finally, when government is in charge of helping the poor, over seventy cents of every dollar – ear marked for the poor – is swallowed up in government bureaucracy. I would never support a private charity with that kind of record.**

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

“A wife of noble character . . . is worth far more than rubies . . . <sup>13</sup> She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands . . . <sup>15</sup> 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]. <sup>16</sup> She considers a field and buys it [many countries do not allow that – and suffer for it]; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard [in many Muslim countries women are repressed in the market place] . . . <sup>18</sup> She sees that her trading is profitable [honest profits are not bad, they are good] . . . <sup>20</sup> 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]. <sup>21</sup> When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet. <sup>22</sup> 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]. <sup>23</sup> Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land [voluntarily and without pay – he is involved in local civil government, helping to maintain justice]. <sup>24</sup> 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].<sup>25</sup> She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come [she doesn't need Social Security checks when she gets older].<sup>26</sup> She speaks with wisdom [which always begins with the fear of God and respect for His laws] and faithful instruction is on her tongue [she is willing to bless others with the truths she has learned to live by].<sup>27</sup> She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness [welfare checks breed idleness, as well as single mothers] . . .<sup>31</sup> Give her the reward she has earned [which means civil government needs to keep its fingers off of her wealth and not redistribute it to others].

We can boil down God's principles of economics into two statements: (1) You shall not steal [that applies to everyone – civil governments included]. And (2) Be generous to others with the wealth God enables you to acquire. Civil government can do something about people who steal – they can apprehend and force them to make restitution to those from whom they have stolen. But civil government cannot force people to be generous without being guilty of stealing from the people they are forcing to be generous.

It is very clear that the United States has many Socialistic policies and practices – and large numbers of people want those practices and policies to increase and grow. Christians need to be a part of the solution and not a part of the problem.