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“Proverbial Capitalism”

Winston Churchill once said, “The inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of blessings; the inherent virtue of socialism is the equal sharing of miseries.” The search for a perfect economic system has resulted primarily in the two imperfect models prevalent today: socialism and capitalism, one of which more closely aligns with God’s scriptures than the other. Socialism’s primary goal is equality for all individuals, which it accomplishes by abolishing private property and giving the government control of all means of distributing money; all receive an equal share of resources regardless of work contribution. Capitalism, on the other hand, has as its base freedom—freedom to own property, spend money, and trade goods and services. It realizes this through its built-in competition. The ambitious individual rises to the top, while the apathetic individual sinks down. Even though one might assume the Bible advocates socialism, with its consideration of the poor, it is ultimately capitalism’s promotion of hard work and rejection of laziness that most reflects the biblical principles found in Proverbs.

Socialism in itself promotes generosity to the needy. It collects from the rich and donates to the poor. The individuals who work hard or even inherit their money must give their earnings to the government, which then gives to each person an equal portion. The poor benefit while the wealthy are gradually divested of their wealth so that each becomes a part of the middle class. In the end, then, this “generosity” is forced, which can engender bitterness and anxiety. God prefers charity that comes from a true desire to help. Proverbs 19:17 says, “He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord.” The Hebrew word for “kind,” *chanan*, has alternate translations of

“compassionate” and even “give voluntarily.” This does not reflect the type of generosity put forth by socialism, which is merely a compulsory “group effort.” As Margaret Thatcher said, “The problem with socialism is that you eventually run out of other people’s money.”

Because socialism contains no inherent incentive for people to participate—since everyone receives equivalent shares—it rubs against the Bible’s exhortation to work hard and earn a living. In the Bible, even the poor must labor for food. Deuteronomy 24:20 commanded the Israelites, “When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless, and the widow.” The helpless gleaned from the fields of the generous if their hunger would be satisfied. The same tenet holds true in capitalism. Capitalism rewards honest labor and good money management with a place on the “ladder of success.” If someone does not exercise honesty, skill, and determination, he or she will not progress materially for long. Furthermore, Proverbs manifestly connects effort with wealth: “All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty” (Proverbs 14:31).

This poverty, which Proverbs condemns, differs from circumstantial poverty. The slothful bring this poorness on themselves, but some types of hardship cannot be helped. All laziness leads to poorness, but not all poverty is a result of laziness. Sloth-induced poverty has no excuses. God gives the slackers no leeway in defending themselves. “The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing” (Proverbs 13:4). Likewise, capitalism does not leave room for those not willing to exert themselves. A person with no work ethic sinks to the bottom of the financial hierarchy. Socialism only encourages this behavior. Clearly, then, the Bible inspires hard work, which is inherent in capitalism, and reproves apathy, which socialism unwittingly condones.

No matter the economic system, no one desires impoverishment. Financial security is a basic human need. Socialism offers this security, but capitalism, though it does not offer the same security, separates the active from the passive and allows enterprising people to have an influence in society. However, those who thrive have a responsibility to those not faring as well. They must, through humility and compassion, contribute generously to the poor, sometimes even to those who have brought it on themselves, for “the righteous gives and does not hold back” (Proverbs 21:26). This generosity is central to righteous management of money. Proverbs vigorously supports this generosity. Socialism, as an economic system, seems to do the same, but does not cut to the root of the issue of generosity. Conversely, capitalism, in its advocacy of earned wealth, ends up providing the means to exercise the biblical values of hard work and cheerful giving.