

The Free Enterprise System Is Biblical

A Thanksgiving Bible Study Exploring Issues Raised in the Article
“Ditching Socialism in the New World: A Lesson for 21st-Century Americans”

Bible Study Overview

We begin with a quotation from “Ditching Socialism” (<https://t.ly/URqME>):

The winter turned to spring, and Squanto became a great encouragement to us, but there was a problem that would plague us the next two years. I come now to the heart of our story. A number of investors in London had financed our voyage to the New World. In turn, they required us to work for them five days out of each week; the remaining two days per week we would be allowed to work for ourselves. After seven years, all profits would be divided equally between us and them. During the five days we worked for them, all our resources had to be held in common. In other words, *no private property!* No one owned any land or resources of his own. Whatever our team of workers generated had to be put into a common store, and individuals would take what they needed for their livelihoods from that same pool.

It's vital that we understand just how important the phrase *no private property* is. As George Washington stated, “Freedom and Property Rights are inseparable. You can't have one without the other.” President Calvin Coolidge echoed this same idea many years later when he said, “Ultimately property rights and personal rights are the same thing.” Significantly, Karl Marx said this: “The theory of Communism may be summed up in one sentence: Abolish all private property.”

What Does the Bible Say?

We see God's "fingerprints" all over the free enterprise economic system. In our brief study, we will look at biblical support for four essential components of the free market —

1. diligent and productive work,
2. rewards for work,
3. voluntary transactions, and
4. property rights.

We've mentioned property rights already, but we'll consider them again, and when we do, we will examine what the Bible says about this important subject.

All four of these are connected — and all of them are essential to the free enterprise economic model. Of course, free enterprise involves more than these four elements, but this introductory study will explore these four.

First, Productive Work

These passages commend productive work: Proverbs 10:4-5; Proverbs 12:14; Proverbs 13:4; Proverbs 14:23; Proverbs 16:26; Proverbs 28:19; Ecclesiastes 3:9-13 (<https://t.ly/Tpxtz>).

The New Testament upholds diligent and productive work as well as the Old Testament, as we soon will see.

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Second, Rewards for Work

The verses cited in point #1 — Proverbs 10:4-5; Proverbs 12:14; Proverbs 13:4; Proverbs 14:23; Proverbs 16:26; Proverbs 28:19; Ecclesiastes 3:9-13 (<https://t.ly/Tpxtz>) — also apply here.

Furthermore, consider that in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians Christians (and he writes to us), “For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.” While this may sound harsh, it actually is completely fair and just. Note that Paul was not talking about those that *cannot* work, but those who *will not* work.

Third, Voluntary Transactions

Many of Jesus’ parables include voluntary economic transactions. In these stories, the free enterprise economic system is presented as a given. See Matthew 13:44; Matthew 13:45-46; Matthew 24:45-51; Matthew 25:1-13; Matthew 25:14-30; Mark 12:1-9; Luke 10:25-37; Matthew 20:1-16 (<https://t.ly/vSwQD>).

Note especially Matthew 20:15, where, in Jesus’ parable of the workers in the vineyard, the landowner asks an important question: “Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things?” Of course, the question is rhetorical, and it is thus a statement. In these words alone we see the following elements.

- Personal choice is endorsed.
- Government's role of protecting rights is supported. The landowner said, "Is it not *lawful* for me to do what I wish with my own things?" (emphasis added).
- Private property is fully acknowledged. The landowner speaks of “my own things.”
- One’s management of the property he or she owns is implicitly, yet strongly, sanctioned.

Acts 2:44-45 and 4:34-35 (<https://t.ly/DejcKA>) often are used to make the case that the early church practiced socialism, but a careful examination of these passages, especially in light of Acts 5:1-11 (<https://t.ly/7JqxY>), show clearly that this isn’t the case. In Acts 2 and Acts 4, (1) contributions were voluntary, (2) the government was not involved, (3) no centralized planning occurred, (4) members who gave owned what they gave until they gave it, and (5) resources were brought to the apostles (not to the government). Also, note in Acts 5:3-4 (<https://t.ly/7JqxY>) Peter’s statements affirming private property rights personal freedoms. The offense was lying about how much had been given and how much had been held back.

Fourth, Property Rights Are a Linchpin Issue

In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, Scripture upholds the right to own and use property as one sees fit. We've just looked at one such passage: Acts 5:1-11. Let's look at several more.

In the Ten Commandments (see Ex. 20:1-17 — <https://t.ly/JSoDG>), the Eighth and Tenth Commandments against stealing and coveting directly and explicitly uphold property ownership and property rights.

We see property rights in Scripture as early as Genesis 23, and the portrait presented is not ambiguous. It includes not only the element of ownership of property and wealth, but also the element of exercising the freedom to exchange it for something else.

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Many of Jesus' parables, including those we cited in our discussion of point #3 (Matthew 13:44; Matthew 13:45-46; Matthew 24:45-51; Matthew 25:1-13; Matthew 25:14-30; Mark 12:1-9; Luke 10:25-37; Matthew 20:1-16 — <https://t.ly/vSwQD>), implicitly affirm property rights. The parables of Luke 15 (<https://t.ly/4Ngre>) do as well. These are (1) the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:4-7, (2) the parable of the lost coin in verses 8-10, and (3) the parable of the lost son in verses 11-32.

To be clear, we hasten to note that the *primary* meaning in each of these parables is not related to property or property rights. Even so, the elements in these parables that *do* relate to property rights still are instructive for us regarding them. Jesus took the free enterprise system for granted— as a *given*. He took elements people naturally understood and wove them into stories that pointed to powerful spiritual truths.

Summing Up

In Ephesians 4:28 (<https://t.ly/Y1rus>), Paul wrote, “Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.” In this verse we see many elements of capitalism upheld; and consequently, socialism destroyed at its very foundation. Here are some of the elements in Ephesians 4:28.

- no stealing (thus respecting others and their rights to own and manage their own property)
- exercising personal responsibility
- engaging in constructive work
- engaging in productive work
- enjoying the fruits of one's labor
- private property rights—The verb translated *he may have* means to own or possess.
- encouragement but not coercion to give to those in need
- treating others with dignity and respect, an innate recognition of all people as made by God in His image

In other words, free enterprise means freedom! It means avoiding misery and moving toward and achieving prosperity as well.

In their book *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born?* ([Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994], 121-122) Dr. D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe write,

The result [of the Pilgrims' adaption of a free market system] was that the following harvest was a tremendous, bountiful harvest, and abundant thanksgiving was celebrated in America. Had they not gone into private enterprise, it is likely the Pilgrims would have died off. Note it well: When socialism was abandoned, Thanksgiving was established! When socialism is reinstated in America, thanksgiving will be abolished! That is the history of America — a lesson that we have all too easily forgotten.

We must remember this lesson and take it to heart! Nothing less than our liberty is at stake!