

Is Redistribution Of Wealth Biblical?

The Principle of Equity

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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Because of the presidential election coming up, the subject that is front and center in the media, at least in terms of the difference between the two candidates, is the subject of the redistribution of wealth to solve economic inequality. The Republicans, as a way to fire back at the Democrats—or specifically at President Obama after Romney's bit of a gaffe in which the Republican candidate calls 47 percent of Americans "dependent on government" since they do not pay federal income taxes, which is true or pretty close to the truth—came up with a video that came from October 19, 1998. During that video, Barack Obama, who was then an Illinois state senator, made this comment when he was speaking at Loyola University:

I think that what we're going to have to do is somehow resuscitate the notion that government action can be effective at all. There has been a systematic—I don't think it's too strong to call it a propaganda—campaign against the possibility of government action and its efficacy. The trick is figuring out how do we structure government systems that pool resources and hence facilitate some [wealth] redistribution, because I actually believe in redistribution, at least at a certain level to make sure that everybody's got a shot.

As soon as this came out, the President's supporters cried foul. They said that the video is 14 years old; therefore, it does not reflect the president's current views. That is spin, pure and simple, because we can go back to 2008, during the last campaign to see him say something very similar to Joe the Plumber. Here it is:

It is not that I want to punish your success. I just want to make sure that everybody who is behind you, [by that, he means poor and not doing quite as well] that they have got a chance at success too. I think, when you spread the wealth around, it is good for everybody.

So, in one quote, he believes in redistribution and in the other one, he said he wants to spread the wealth around.

We can also see in the last four to five years, from his policies, that redistribution of

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wealth is exactly what he is trying to do in this nation. He says that it is only fair that those who have made more money, the wealthy whom he describes as making \$250,000 per year, pay higher taxes. Those taxes are to be given to the poor, to those who are indigent. This will then level the playing field, bringing equality to an unequal situation. That is, equality for all Americans and give everyone a fair shot to enjoy this country's prosperity.

In other words, if you cannot make the money yourself, you take it through taxation from someone who has made money, and give it to those who will not or cannot work. There is nothing wrong with a bit of welfare for those who cannot work, but, it is wrong to give to those who *will not work*. His idea that there should be equality on what we make sounds good on the surface. It sounds like he is trying to make everybody have a lot of money. We will see that that is not what happens.

What it comes out to in practice is nothing more than Robin Hood by government. You steal through heavy taxation from the rich to give to the poor. As a matter of fact, it is like Robin Hood in collusion with King John. They keep all of the money in government actually. The consequence of this is that those who receive these benefits from government are more inclined to vote for those politicians who will keep the 'gravy train' rolling.

There is the rub in all of this. This is why this policy is being used. It has been found very clearly that those who will give more to the voters usually end up being elected. Therefore they are put into power and if they can retain that power and control, they will do whatever they can to do those kinds of things. They will continue to do those policies.

I am not trying to be political here. I am just using the example of Barack Obama because it is so clear and plain. The Republican policy, as much as I hate to say it, is just a few footsteps behind. They are a little further back along the curve, but they want a similar thing. They have not done anything to repeal the big welfare programs from the Federal Government. When they get into office, they tend to spend as much as the Democrats. The old question is, 'Is there a dime's difference between the two parties?' Well, it depends on how much you value your dime. Really, it is just a matter of a little bit of perspective.

I am trying to be more factual here, because it is easily proven that the redistribution of wealth does not work. Honest economists will admit that redistribution policies have never worked wherever they have been tried. Dr. Thomas Sowell, who is a Fellow at the Hoover Institution, wrote in a recent article entitled, 'The Fallacy of Redistribution'.

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The history of the 20th century is full of examples of countries who set out to redistribute wealth and ended up redistributing poverty. The communist nations [which were economic disasters] were a classic example, but by no means the only example. When the Soviet Union confiscated the wealth of successful farmers, food became scarce. How can that be? Farmers in the Soviet Union cut back on how much time and effort they invested in growing their crops when they realized that the government was going to take the biggest part of the harvest. They slaughtered and ate young farm animals that they would have normally kept and raised to maturity. People in industry are not inert objects either. Moreover, unlike farmers, industrialists are not tied to the land in a particular country. Financiers are even less tied down. Especially today when vast sums of money can be dispatched electronically to any part of the world. Those who are targeted for confiscation can see the handwriting on the wall and act accordingly. [They leave the country or they get their money out of the country.] Among the most valuable assets in any nation are the knowledge, skills, and productive experience that economists call human capital. When successful people with much human capital leave the country, either voluntarily or because of hostile governments or hostile mobs whipped up by demagogues exploiting envy, lasting damage can be done to the economy they leave behind.

What Dr. Sowell said is, when the government demands that the wealthy, the industrialists, and the financiers give up their money to the poor, they say that they are not going to take it. They have options. So the farmers stop farming. The industrialists say they will go some place where they can do their business more freely. So they go to some place like Chile or some place like that where they have better policies.

Of course, the financiers either send their money out of the country or they themselves go to some place like Switzerland, the Cayman Islands, or wherever their money happens to be. They do not need to stay. They will take all of their expertise with them. This was something that happened in Rhodesia—now Zimbabwe—when Mubagwe came to power and started doing things of this measure. A lot of the white farmers and industrialists fled. They left their country in very poor shape.

You can see in this small example that redistribution of wealth does not work. We found that communist redistribution did not work. European welfare states are showing that soft communism, which is known as socialism, with its redistributionist policies, are clear economic messes. The European Union is hanging on by a thread.

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The American form of it is the same thing, just a little bit behind the curve of what the European socialists have done. We are not getting out of it. Our untouchable entitlements, like Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, food stamps, crop subsidies, and other welfare type programs, have sunk us into multiple trillions of dollars of debt—debt that will never, ever be repaid. We are already economically enslaved because of it. That debt is going to tie our hands in so many ways. There are so many unintended consequences of it that we cannot foresee. It is a huge problem.

Whatever the form, communism, socialism, American democracy, or whatever you want to call what America is today, redistribution does not work. As Jesus said, the poor are still with us. As much as we have tried to come up with a human solution to the problem of poverty, it has not made a dent. There always seems to be a percentage of people who live below the poverty line, whatever the poverty line is. There are always some who never seem to make it, or to be a little more forceful, *will not* make it. Those who refuse to make it. Of course, there are those who cannot because of certain circumstances beyond their control.

What we have found in history is that redistribution of wealth by governmental decree by one form or another just makes everyone poor. They say that things like a 'free market' raises all ships; that a free market raises everybody up to a form of prosperity. Redistribution does the exact opposite. It tends to lower everybody. Instead of shared prosperity, it shared misery.

As plain as this can be shown economically, progressives still push the idea of redistribution ideologically. They do this and say it is morally good. It does not matter how it works out; it is just morally good to do so because you are giving to the poor. The religious among them claim that this is what God, Jesus, and the apostles advocated in Scripture. (This is when this sermon actually starts.) They fall back on the Bible and say that you are not a Christian if you do not support this policy of redistribution. You wealthy Christians want to keep all of that money for yourself and keep the poor down.

This is not what Jesus taught. Jesus taught that you should give to the poor. They say this as they quote a few scriptures from the Bible. They say, if it was good enough for Jesus, it is good enough for me; or it is good enough for America. So, they say, like Jesus, we should be willing to give our last shekel to help the poor. Was He not poor? Did He not give His last drop of blood? They say that it is the Christian way.

They put us in what they think is a moral bind. We either have to give up our politics or our Christianity. In this country, more people would be willing to give up their Christianity than their politics. They are trying to make us guilty by saying we are not Christians if we

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do not support their redistribution policy. They say if Jesus were here, He would support it.

Is this true? Does the Bible, Jesus, God, or the apostles support redistribution? Maybe even more fundamentally we should ask the question, does God believe in equality? Wow! That is a tough one. Does God believe in equality? Should we all be economically equal? Is disparity of wealth between rich and poor wrong? Is it bad to have some people be wealthy, even super-wealthy, and other people who are poor or absolutely penniless? We will see.

I will give you my conclusions right here. I will show you what we are going to look at through the rest of the sermon. We will see that the Bible does *not* teach equality. That economic *disparity* is considered a 'given'. That is where you start. Start with the fact that there will be economic disparity. Some will be richer. Some will be poorer. Lastly, the Bible teaches that we *should* help the poor. This should be freely and of our own accord. Not under any kind of coercion, especially not governmental coercion.

The three points we are going to see throughout this sermon are: (1) The Bible does not teach equality; (2) economic disparity is considered a 'given' in the Bible; and (3) we should indeed help the poor, but freely and of our own accord.

We will begin our search in the Bible by going to Acts 20:35. I think this is a good verse to encapsulate the New Testament's teaching in giving to the poor. This is Paul giving his final message, his conclusion and farewell address to the Ephesian elders. It kind of puts everything together.

Acts 20:35 I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

This is the encapsulation of the New Testament teaching on giving. Paul's example and his teaching to the church are based on this principle that he attributes to Jesus. This is not found in the Gospels anywhere. We do not even know if Jesus actually said this, but it is certainly something that we could say encapsulates Jesus' message on giving. He probably did say it; it is just not written down in the Gospels. This is what he gives us to form a basis of our understanding. It is a blessed thing to give. It is not so blessed to receive. There is good that comes out of giving. You get favor with God because you are doing what He does and it does good for others. That has its own way of blessing us.

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Paul then writes in II Corinthians 9. We usually go to this scripture in offertory sermonettes.

II Corinthians 9:7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

God wants us to learn to have this same sort of 'giving' attitude that God Himself has. Of course Mr. Armstrong certainly picked up on this. He said that God's way is the way of give. He is full of outgoing concern. He wants to help people. We can say He is the God of grace. Grace is His bestowing favor of one sort or another on people without them really meriting it. We will go to a scripture a little bit later where Jesus says His Father gives to good and bad equally. He rains on the just and the unjust. We all are given a part of His grace in every breath that we take, every morsel of food we eat, and so forth. These are all gifts of God and He freely gives them. He is not under any compulsion to give them. He gives them out of His own surplus.

We are to follow that example—the example of Paul living his life. He told us to imitate him as he imitated Christ. He told the Ephesian elders, "I have given you the example of how I labored for all of you. I put my life on the line." We could go through that list of perils of Paul that he went through to preach the gospel. He was constantly giving of himself in everything. This is a blessing. It was a blessing that he bestowed on the church. He would get his reward from Christ.

He showed by his own actions that he would support the weak in his work in preaching the gospel. We know that Paul was well known for taking his tent trade with him wherever he went, laboring with his own hands, so that the church did not have to support him. He was an example of someone who could do this. He is commended throughout the pages of the New Testament for such a thing. He was showing by his example that this is the way that you give. You give freely of your own accord because there is a blessing in that, both to the one who receives it and to the giver himself.

We must not take this verse out of context as many do. Many will take Acts 20:35 and II Corinthians 9:7 to say that we should be giving to everyone; to say that everyone is equal. That is not what the context is saying. The context in Acts 20 is to the Ephesian elders and the context in II Corinthians 9 is to the Corinthian church. He is talking to church members. He is talking to Christians in both places. This is a general counsel to the church. It is not a general counsel to everyone. That is a very important point.

Let us go to I John 3. Here John is speaking to the church and talking about how giving

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shows love.

I John 3:17-18 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

He approaches this from the negative, but we can easily see that a person who has the love of God in him would be kindhearted. They would not shut their heart. They would open their heart to someone who has need. They would shower them with what they needed, whether it be money, food, clothing, or whatever to fill that need. That is why verse 18 says, "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue," saying, 'oh yeah, I'll help you,' but never do it. John says to do it in deed and in truth.

If we say we are Christians, that we love God, and we want to help people, we will follow through and show that love in our giving. This reiterates the general New Testament teaching. The general New Testament teaching is pretty much to the church. There are places where it says that if you find a need in the community, you can fill that need too.

There is a ranking of this. First your own, then those in the church, and then if there is enough left over, you help those who are outside in the community. The understanding in Christianity is that we are to do this. It is to be 'freely' given. It is something we think through; it is not something we are 'made' to do because everyone is forced to do it. The reason is because it helps us to grow. It helps us to grow into the image of God. When we make these decisions, personally through prayer and study, that we are going to give a certain amount to a person in need, that is when character is formed.

Let us go see an example of Jesus. Matthew 6:1 is a very important scripture with instruction for us. It is important for us to understand the basic charge to the church about giving. This is a passage that is aimed as a warning against self-promotion and hypocrisy.

Matthew 6:1-4 "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know

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what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret;
and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

Jesus does not want us to be charitable so that everyone knows what a good person we are. That is the main understanding that we get from this passage. He says very clearly that helping others should be done privately without regard for any kind of tangible benefit in return. It is to the point where even our left hand does not know what our right hand is doing. You should get the point that it is supposed to be so secret that even you do not know about it. That does not make a whole lot of sense, but this is hyperbole.

He wants us to get to the point where you are not doing good deeds to be seen by men. It comes to the point that you will give out of the character that you have built and you do not even know you are doing it! It is just the way you are.

That is what it says in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. The sheep will get this great reward for doing all of these things for Jesus and they ask, 'When did we do all of this stuff?' Jesus says, "You were doing it all along to your brother, so you were doing it to Me." Here, it was part of their character, their normal routine, to give. In that way, their left hand did not know what their right was doing. They did not think of it in terms of getting anything in return. It was just what they did. It was the way they are. It is what Jesus wants from us.

Here now, I am more interested in what is not stated. Look at what is left unsaid. That is simply that God expects us to do charitable deeds. It is not 'if' you do a charitable deed, it is 'when' you do a charitable deed. It is a given that God's people will be doing charitable deeds for others. He had just given what was there in Matthew 5:44 before this.

Matthew 5:44-45 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

He had already raised the bar. We are more than willing to give to those we love and who love us in return. If God is willing to make the sun rise and send the rain on both the good and evil, we should do these things: love our enemies, bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us, and pray for those who spitefully use us. That goes

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way beyond just giving charitable deeds. He wants us to give charitable deeds to everyone, no matter how they feel about us, or how we might feel about them. It is not a matter of whether we do charitable deeds, but how we do them. Charitable deeds are a given that we ought to be giving them.

We can see by these few scriptures that we have read, that Christians are indeed to be charitable. We are to do what we can to help those who are less fortunate, whoever they are and however much we have. That is just the way it is. Whether we do these things is not the question at all. I think we all agree on this point. God really does love a cheerful giver because that is what He is. He also is a cheerful giver. This is what we need to be doing. It did not take very many scriptures to show this. If the Boss says it, that should be enough for us to do it. His apostle says it also. We know that it is expected of us.

Does God believe in equality of wealth or equality of possessions? Look at the social side of this. Socialists believe that one person's wealth is based on another's poverty. This is straight from Marx. What this means is that someone cannot be rich unless he takes it from those who are under him.

You may have heard of the term, 'zero sum game'. This is an economic principle. It is a wrong one. It is an economic principle that there is only so much wealth in the world. If someone is rich, he has more than his fair share of the pot. So the socialist and communist theory is that you have to take part of his slice and distribute it to the other people whose slices are much smaller. There is no other way, they say, to make more wealth. That is wrong. You can create wealth all of the time. Wealth is just a measure of value. Wealth is being created constantly; just not in our economy.

Under a free market, when people are able to make decisions, wealth is able to be created. To the 'zero sum game' group, disparity of wealth is a sign of social injustice. In other words, if someone has more than somebody else, he must have done something unjust to get it. He must have stabbed somebody in the back. He must have stolen from some poor widow. He must have done something underhanded in order to get it.

This is what they call inequality. If we just have the right kind of justice, the right kind of laws put in place, then we will tip the scales back toward balance. That is what they think. If there is a disparity of wealth, there is social injustice, and that this must be corrected. The situation must be equalized.

This is where you start getting in the term of equality. We will not be talking necessarily as being equal as citizens or in terms of our 'rights'. That is not what we are talking

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about. We are talking about equality in terms of wealth primarily. Economic equality verses political equality. We are talking mostly about economic equality.

If they would look upon a map of Los Angeles County, they would see that the graph shows that there is a ton of wealth over Beverly Hills in Hollywood. But, just over Watts in East Los Angeles, there is hardly any wealth. They look at this and say, 'This shouldn't be. There's too much wealth in Beverly Hills in Hollywood. We've got to find a way to even things out. We have to have some way to cut off the top of those wealth towers and ship them to Watts, in East Los Angeles so that everything is fair. Give the people in Watts, in Los Angeles a hand up; give them their fair share.'

We have heard all of these terms in the political discourse of our day. We do not have to use Los Angeles. We could use New York City. Midtown Manhattan is probably one of the richest places in the entire world. But that is just a few miles away from some places in Queens, the Bronx, and Harlem that are down and out. They used to be ghettos. I do not know if they still are, but socialists look at that and say it is horrible. It should not be that way. We are going to take from the rich and give it to the poor. This will even out the playing field. If people think this way (and that is the way socialists think), it becomes the socialists' main goal to bring about equal distribution of wealth. They will go about doing that by writing social injustices.

Did you notice something here? Socialists cry out for equality. The Bible does not. The Bible cries out for equity. They are two *very* different words. Equality is not equity. It is very important that we understand the difference between the two. There is a little bit of overlapping and that is where the confusion comes in. Both of these words have specialized meanings that we need to understand.

Equality is sameness, likeness, evenness, or uniformity. It is a straight line. Everybody is the same. We all wear the same gray jumpsuit, as in China, because we are all the same. That is equality. *Equity* is impartiality, justice, and legal fairness. It is very different. In Psalm 98, we will find that God deals with equity, not equality.

Psalm 98:9 For He is coming to judge the earth. With righteousness He shall judge the world, and the peoples with equity.

That means He is going to judge impartially. That means He is going to judge justly. He is going to be legally fair with everyone. As Romans the second chapter tells us, He is without partiality. When He is going to judge, He will look at people's works and He will put the sheep on the right and the goats on the left. There will not be any way anybody

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will ever be able to say that God was unfair in His judgment because His judgment is based on the same thing for everyone. It is fair; it is legally fair. It is just and it is impartial.

Equity implies each person having the same standing under the law. The law itself applies equally to everyone. There is no favoritism and no bribery that would change the outcome. Everything will be just. Everything will be equitable. All will be treated the same way.

That is where the two terms overlap. There is a little bit of sameness in equity. The part about equity that you need to understand is that it is 'legal' in the way that it is applied. People are equal under the law. We have that term that we use all of the time here in America. Today we speak of things like 'the rule of law'. The rule of law is a wonderful institution where the law is over all men. There is no one who is above the law. The principle of the law is if something happens, the law applies the same to everyone. That is equity.

Equality has come to be understood as 'sameness of outcome'. That is important. What it has come to mean in street language is that we all have the same amount and the same things. Like I said, that we all own one gray jumpsuit and look like everyone else. That is the ultimate goal of socialism. To make us like the Chinese where we all are the same. I am not saying that the Chinese are all the same, but that is what the Chinese are trying to do in the Republic of China.

They are coming out of that a little now, but if you go back and look at the pictures from the '50s and the '60s you can see what Mao was trying to do. He tried to dress everybody the same and get everybody to be on the same level with everything except the politburo, but we will not talk about them. That is kind of how it was. It is kind of a gray evenness over everyone. No one gets to rise higher than anyone else. The way it works in most of the communist nations is if you try to rise above anyone, you will get beaten down. This is where repression comes in and all of the rest.

We can see here that there is a huge difference between equity and equality. The Bible wants us to be equitable; not necessarily equal. If we treat everyone fairly, then we are all free to use the tools, skills, and blessings that we have been given and prosper with them. Equity sets up an atmosphere of freedom and a playground where the rules are the same for everyone. We are all able to do what our natural abilities, and the ones that God gives us as well, to do whatever it is we wish to do and succeed. Equality tends to do the opposite. It tends to repress everyone in the sameness. No one has the freedom to get above the rest or to succeed and prosper.

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Turn with me please to I Samuel 2 and we will pull a principle out of this. This is right in the middle of Hannah's dilemma. This is the prayer right after Samuel was born.

I Samuel 2:1-5 And Hannah prayed and said: "My heart rejoices in the Lord; my horn is exalted in the Lord. I smile at my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation. No one is holy like the Lord, for there is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God. Talk no more so very proudly; let no arrogance come from your mouth, for the Lord is the God of knowledge; and by Him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty men are broken, and those who stumbled are girded with strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread and the hungry have ceased to hunger. Even the barren has borne seven and she who has many children has become feeble."

Hannah starts her prayer by praising God. She calls God her Savior. She calls God holy and that there is no one like You. You are a rock; You are steady and always the same. You can be relied on and trusted.

In verse 5, Hannah says that those who had a lot to eat ended up having to work for food. Those who were hungry have ceased to hunger. There is a reversal here. Some that were high became low, and those that were low became high, or at least had enough. Another reversal in the last part. The barren has borne seven and those who have many children have become feeble. Someone who was down is rejoicing because she is able to bear children, but the one who was up, bearing all of these children, has become feeble for some reason.

I Samuel 2:6-8 The Lord kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up. The Lord makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory.

Do we see what is happening here? Did God make everyone equal? Does God treat everyone equally? Not necessarily, at least under our concepts of equality. We might say, 'Hey God, you're doing all of this and you have the power. Why not just make everybody rich?' That is not the way He works. 'Hey God, with all of Your power, why not make everybody strong and healthy forever?' That is not the way He runs. He reserves the right to Himself. He can take someone who is rich and put them in sackcloth. He can take someone who is dirt poor and set them on a throne as king. He

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can take someone who is begging and make them into someone who is giving. He does not demand.

Actually, He does not work it out where everybody is the same. We are all on different levels throughout life. Sometimes we are up, and sometimes we are down. Sometimes we are in; sometimes we are out. Sometimes we are flush; sometimes our pockets are turned up. That is just the way life is. Sometimes God just lets that go to learn lessons; sometimes He does things to make us learn those lessons. If we are getting a big head with too much money or too much power, He puts the pin in our head and we deflate. We shrink down to little nothingness and we have to learn to be humble and abased.

God is not terribly concerned that we all be level all of the time with one another. God does not act with equality. He does act with equity because when He judges, no matter what has happened throughout our lives, whether up or down, in or out, or however it was, He will judge the results of our lives fairly according to His Word. He will deal with equity; not equality.

Social and material equality are really not all that important to God. Where we are now in terms of whether we are up or down or whatever, is not really all that important, except what we learn from it and the character we put on. Think about it. Look at all of the people God dealt with in His Word. Abraham was immensely rich. He had more money than he needed, his sons needed, and his grandsons needed. He just had a lot of money—gold, silver, animals, and what have you.

Look at Elijah: He had to be helped by a widow and had to have ravens come and give him food. There were a couple of times in his life where he was just down and out and would have loved to have some of Abraham's money. Think about David. David was a king. God made him a king. Then there is somebody like Amos, who was just a sheep breeder and a tender of sycamore trees or something like that. It does not sound like he was anything special. He was just one of the guys that had a farm. Elisha was a farmer, although he had twelve yoke of oxen, which probably meant that he had a pretty prosperous farm. God works with the high and he works with the low.

How about God's Son? His Son was God! He was born in a stable or a cave and when He went home, He went to live with His mother and His stepfather. Joseph was a carpenter. Jesus learned that trade. He did not grow up in palaces. God's disciples also. They were fishermen and tradesmen of some sort. Probably the richest one was Matthew (or Levi), the tax collector. Maybe Judas was the richest; I do not know. He probably had bags of gold hidden in his house. He probably did not need the 30 pieces of silver. He was a thief. That is another interesting fact—God was willing to work with a

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thief. It did not turn out very well. God is not worried about equality.

This idea has not changed in the church. God does not make us put our money in a common pot once we are baptized. That is just the way it is. Some of us make pennies and some of us make many thousands and maybe hundreds of thousands of dollars. We even have had some millionaires; not in this church, as far as I know. In the past there have been very wealthy people in the church, yet there are a lot of poor families and a lot of widows.

God works with all of us. We are mixed together. Whatever our social rank and our economic rank, we are all one body. God works with us in that way. You could say that in that way, we are all equal because we are all parts of His body. That is really not even true. Go back with me to I Corinthians 12, because God shows that there really is not equality in the body either, depending on how you look at equality.

I Corinthians 12:13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

Here we have been made equal. One Spirit put into one body. We are good there. We are all pretty much equal and have all been given the same thing. But, go down to verse 20.

I Corinthians 12:20-31 But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But

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earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

We can see here that there are disparities in the body. Having been put in the body, some people have been made honorable and other people, while still honorable, are not brought up to that level. We have some parts of our body that we consider to be better, more presentable as He says here, than other parts. There is inequality in that in terms of them being presentable or not.

We do not have the same trials. When one person suffers, we all suffer with them. We may not suffer the same way that others suffer. Because of our empathy, we do suffer with them. They are the ones actually going through the trial. When one member is honored, all members rejoice with them.

Now you are in the body of Christ and members individually. I could go on, because He goes on to show that not all the members of the same body are given the same gifts. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? We are given different jobs to do. Sometimes, being given one job is a great honorable thing and being given another job, well, you know, that is not so great. We all have to do those jobs. We all have gifts to do those jobs.

He ends the chapter saying, "I am going to show you the greatest gift of all, which is the gift of love; a more excellent way." That is something we all can do, no matter what our station, what our part of the church is, we can all show love to one another.

What we are seeing here is that even in the church, there is disparity. There are differences. God blesses some more and some less. God gives certain gifts to one that is honorable. He gives gifts to others that are less honorable, but useful.

In I Corinthians 7, I will just mention this, Paul even tells church members who were baptized as slaves not to worry about getting out of it.

I Corinthians 7:17-24 But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches. Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised: Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is

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called while free is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.

He says, "Stay in the calling, vocation, or the position in which you were called. Do not try to get out of it, but use it for good." Even slaves, which were the very bottom of the social status, were told to not worry about it. It is not all that important to become free, but if you do become free, use it for good. Paul obviously was not necessarily worried about social equality; or even financial equality. The slaves did not have anything. There were rich people in the church also. He did not try to make the rich become middle class so that the slaves could rise up in social status. He said, "Go ahead and stay where you are in whatever calling, vocation, social standing, or class you were in. Just make it work." That is the way that God has made it happen.

Now look at I Timothy 6. Paul was talking to Timothy about rich people in the church. Notice his instructions.

I Timothy 6:17-19 Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Paul is saying you do not have to give all of your money away if you are rich. He does say to use your money and trust God. Let the rich people do good. Notice how Paul phrases this: ". . . ready to give and willing to share." He does not say, ". . . giving all of their dishonest gain"; he just says that they are ready to give. If they have the money and they see a need, they need to be ready and willing to give. They do not have to give all of their money to the poor. They are to use that money as a tool for growth, learning to give as God gives.

They do need to guard against the misuse of their money. I will give you the scriptures. James 5:1-6 says that the rich are making the lives of the poor very hard. That is not the Christian way and James makes sure they know that they should use their money in a different way.

James 5:1-5 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-

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eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter.

Think about the poor also. The poor have the ability to use their poverty for good; to learn important things that God wants them to learn.

This next set of verses is when Jesus was watching the widow come and deposit her little penny in the treasury. Jesus says she gave out of her poverty. The rich people were giving out of their sustenance. She learned to give sacrificially in a way that the rich person could never have learned. The widow was trusting God for her needs and maybe she needed to do that.

Mark 12:43-44 So He called His disciples to Him and said to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.

James 2:5 Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

James' rhetorical question tells us that we are to be rich in faith no matter what our financial situation is and to be witnesses for what God has done for us. It does not matter how much money we have. God will use what we have to help us grow towards the Kingdom of God, toward the image of Christ, and, as Paul says in I Corinthians 1, God will take this poverty of ours, our foolishness, and whatever else, and confound the wise of this world. He will take us in whatever state we are in now and turn us into His sons and bring glory to God; because if we can become sons of God, anyone can be.

Some people use Acts 2 to say that there was communism in the church. This is not true. This was a special, temporary, emergency situation in which thousands of people were coming into the church. Many of them were not from Jerusalem and had spent all of their money and used up their provisions. They were staying in Jerusalem to hear the

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apostles' instructions. The people pooled their resources so that they could stay for a little longer and have enough resources to get back home to their own areas. They had all things in common for a very short time. This lasted for a little while.

There is a place in Acts 4 where it talks about this sort of thing. It also shows, when you go into Acts 5 with Ananias and Sapphira, that these people were selling their homes and land in order to give to the rest of the church. Peter very specifically says, 'While it was still in your possession, did you not have control over it?' It was not that they were being forced to give up their possessions. They were always in control of how much they gave, which proves this is not a type of communism. If you go through the book of Acts and the epistles of Paul, and even the epistles of John, you will find that throughout the New Testament period, and through the whole Old Testament period, church members still owned their own homes. It is very clear. They went into this person's house and into that person's house, etc. People still have control over their own wealth.

I do want to go to Luke 19, however, just to show that in the Kingdom of God there is still going to be inequality. Most people think that in the Kingdom, we will all be the same; NOPE, not at all! This is about the Parable of the Minas.

Luke 19:11-27 Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. Therefore He said, "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business till I come.' But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We will not have this man to reign over us.' And so it was that when he returned, having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned ten minas.' And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.' And the second came, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned five minas.' Likewise he said to him, 'You also be over five cities.' And another came, saying 'Master, here is your mina, which I have kept put away in a handkerchief. For I feared you, because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit and reap what you did not sow.' And he said to him, 'Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked servant. You knew that I was an austere man, collecting what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow. Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest?'

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And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him and give it to him who has ten minas.' (But they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas.')

For I say to you, that to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. But bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay them before me."

In verse 13, he called 10 servants and delivered to them 10 minas. Each person was given the same amount. Then in verse 15, the Master comes back. He came to the first person he gave minas to in verse 16, saying 'Master your mina has earned 10 minas.' The Master gives him authority over 10 cities. The second came saying, 'Master, your mina has earned five minas'. The Master says, "I am going to give you 10 cities." No, he does not! He says, "Since you earned five minas, you will have authority over five cities." The third one who had been given a mina did not do anything with it. In verse 24, the Master says to take the mina from him and give it to the servant who was given authority over 10 cities.

Notice verse 25. But they, meaning His disciples, said to him, 'Master, he has 10 minas!' They did not think that was fair! For God, that was equitable. Not equal; it was equitable. The one who had gained 10 minas did the work! He grew. He produced. He deserved a reward. Since this mina was handy, God gave it to the one most deserving. Even in the Kingdom of God there will be some inequality. Some will be given five cities; some will be given ten cities; some will be given two cities; some will be given whatever it is, commensurate with their spiritual growth.

Paul shows in I Corinthians 3:12-15 that our reward is based on what we build on the foundation of Christ. Some produce gold, some produce silver, some produce precious stones, while others produce wood, hay, and straw. If the works endure, we will receive a fitting and commensurate reward. Think about it. The apostles will be kings over the tribes of Israel. David will be king over them. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be over them. Is that equal? Hardly! But, it is equitable because those men proved their faith.

I Corinthians 3:12-15 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become manifest; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

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I hope I have given you enough evidence from Scripture that God does not advocate forcible, or governmental, redistribution of wealth. He does not advocate any kind of social or material equality. It is not what God is after. He wants us to work to produce profitably and to give generously to those in need. He wants us to do this of our own volition or of our own accord, freely. The principle that we can take home with us—the one that we can live by—is found way back in the book of Deuteronomy. We go to it just about every time we take up an offering.

Deuteronomy 16:17 Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you.