



INSIDE

MINISTRY UPDATE

Capitol Ministries
Launches in Zambia
as Millions Watch
on TV..... 2

VERSE OF THE WEEK

1 John 3:17..... 3

ABOUT

Capitol Ministries®..... 8



 GOVERNMENT & ECONOMICS SERIES | PART 8

The Rich and the Poor



THE GOVERNMENT AND ECONOMICS series addresses some of the most pertinent topics that you, our nation’s policymakers, have said you find most important and interesting. My personal conviction is that to provide effective Bible teaching to governmental leaders, expositors must drill down on what God has to say about all manner of things, and accordingly that would include macroeconomic issues. As we have seen, God’s Word has much to say about the matters of government and economics. This week I want to explore what Scripture says about the relationship between government and the rich and the poor.

Read on, my friend.

Ralph Drollinger

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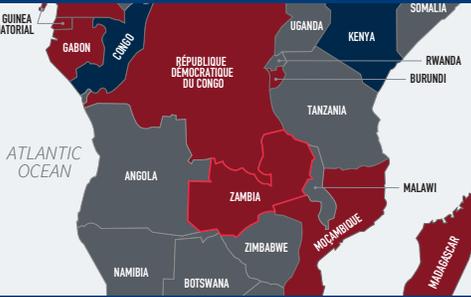
CABINET: 7:00 AM Wednesdays, location undisclosed, refreshments served.
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HOUSE: 7:45 AM Thursdays, The Capitol Hill Club, hot breakfast served.

The views expressed in each Bible study are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the position of any individual Bible Study Sponsor.



MINISTRY UPDATE

Capitol Ministries Launches in Zambia as Millions Watch on TV



When Capitol Ministries launched a discipleship Bible study to national government leaders in Zambia, millions of people watched the ceremonies on television.

The launch was a highlight of a week-long trip to several Africa nations last year by Brian Hanson, Capitol Ministries International Director, and Jon Cassel, Capitol Ministries Global Director for Africa. During the event, which was televised to the nation's 17 million citizens, a Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) video interview was shown with Ralph and Danielle Drollinger, founders of Capitol Ministries, who talked about the mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ among the political leaders of the world.

Pastor Hanson explained that CapMin would pair a Bible teacher with a member of parliament who would host weekly Bible studies, and that all materials were free. He was asked what CapMin expected in return, and replied, "Nothing," which brought surprised looks on many faces.

"I said, 'We want nothing from you, we only want to offer you the absolute truth of the Word of God,' and so many of them looked us square in the eye as if searching to

Continued next page

I. INTRODUCTION

What Scripture has to say to public servants regarding the proper treatment of the rich and the poor is an important subject. To make the best sense of this and create an exegetically complete theologicum (a solely biblically based treatise on the matter), I will outline this study in terms of government and the wealthy, government and the poor, and government and equality. I think you will find this most intriguing and helpful to you personally and in terms of policy formation.

II. GOVERNMENT AND THE WEALTHY

One other fruit left hanging on the apple tree in Eden was a species that has since made its way into every orchard of the world. It is called *prejudice*, and it isn't very tasty; in fact, it is always rotten to the core. Nonetheless, many are those who feast on it. Outside of the control and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, prejudging—acting partially, stereotyping, and categorizing others—is one of those default tendencies of the sin nature. Applied to this study, it is the underlying reason why people too often assume that those who are rich are crooked. As fallen human beings, we have a propensity to feel like we are superior to others, and so with others who are wealthier, believing they are crooked is a convenient way to immediately fulfill our superiority quotient.

A. INCOME AND JUSTICE

In terms of personal income tax (see part 7 for a more thorough examination of this point), prejudicial conclusions lead to the governmental justification of taxing the rich at higher percentages. Those

who have greater wealth in America are treated differently than those without. Common statements such as, "It is time for wealthy people to start paying their fair share" illustrate this bias. But what is fair and just is for all citizens to have to pay the same rate no matter their lot in life—with no matter for income amounts. Lady Justice is supposed to sport a blindfold.

A wealthy person should not have to pay a higher percentage because he makes more money any more than a poor person should have to pay a higher percentage because he makes less.

Either treatment is partial. What is just and fair is for everyone to pay the same percentage regardless of investment timing, earning power, skill, education, creativity, work ethic, comfort with risk, or other determining factors pertaining to personal income in a definitively free market. Justice in government taxation means government should not be prejudicial regarding such factors. For government to do otherwise is to treat citizens with different standards. Note Romans 13:1 with this in mind:

"Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God."

It stands to reason that if the *authority* of government is *established by God*, that governments, in order to reflect the very nature and attributes of their Author and to be pleasing to their Author, need too to be just and fair in their actions with all citizens. It is therefore not just for governments to tax citizens



at different percentages of income. In fact, 1 Peter 2:13–14 says that God’s institution of government is “*sent by Him ... for the praise of those who do right.*”

“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.”

One could reason from this passage that governments unjustly penalize those who create jobs and value-added products for the betterment of society, while, in reality, Scripture tells us that those who create wealth should be *praised* and incentivized by government to do even greater value-added creation—perhaps by incentivizing such people with tax breaks! Such leads to more job creation and employment. Note the passage again:

The concept of penalizing those who do right is not supported by Scripture, whereas rewarding those who do right is.

For one to excuse disproportional taxing of a resourceful individual with a dismissive comment, “They can afford it” or “It won’t hurt them,” is to cast aside the consideration of justice in society; it is, in fact, to display prejudice and partiality when the state is definitively a free market. Much more often than not, the reason wealthy people are wealthy is because they have been willing to take more risk when they saw an opportunity, and/or because they worked harder and/or had more character and perseverance. Such things are honorable attributes that are worthy of *praise* by government—not penalty.

B. POWER AND PARTIALITY

Further on this biblical idea is this: to allow a poor man a lower taxation rate is for government to show partiality when it is called by God to be impartial. Notice Exodus 23:3 in this regard:

“Nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his dispute.”

In context, this passage relates to a courtroom matter, but the principle is applicable to economic justice as well, and the principle is this: it is all too easy to lose one’s sense of empirical economic justice when there are outwardly noticeable differences between two parties, be it in a courtroom or on a tax return. I have experienced this phenomenon in my own life in other ways. By the time I arrived in Westwood as a college freshman, Coach Wooden had already won eight national championships in the previous nine years. I was fortunate to play on his remaining two national championship teams. During that unparalleled decade of college sports domination, I witnessed firsthand how often the referees would attempt to help out the other team. It’s human nature to root for the underdog, the lesser party, but for one in authority to engage in such behavior is to display partiality and injustice. It is not right, fair, or just. Be it a basketball court or free-market enterprise, the rules of the game are well known to all going in. No matter the game, it follows that both referees and government officials should treat each in the same.

I remember one day remarking to Congressman Darrell Issa in front of his staff how pleased I was that he had elevated one particular Congressman

♥ VERSE OF THE WEEK

1 John 3:17

“But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?”



Scripture never suggests that civil government is the curing institution for poverty. But the responsibility for providing a societal safety net falls to individual believers, heads of households, families, and churches.

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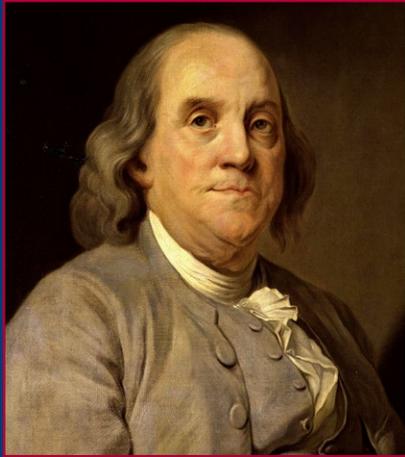
see if that were true,” Pastor Hanson said. “They had never heard anything like this before.”

“This ministry and others we have established could mean an awakening among the African nations. There is an awareness of an almighty God in some of the nations, some even call themselves Christian nations, but that doesn’t mean they have humbled themselves and given themselves over to His ways and implemented biblical principles in their lives.

“We heard so often during the trip that they want to learn the Word of God and we want to teach. They are hungry, eager, ready and we have told them, we are not interested in changing your laws, we are interested in changing your hearts.”



Benjamin Franklin



“To relieve the misfortunes of our fellow creatures [the poor] is concurring with the Deity, —it is godlike, but if we provide encouragement for laziness and supporters for folly, may it not be found fighting against the order of God and Nature, which has perhaps appointed want and misery as the proper punishments for, and cautions against, as well as necessary consequences of idleness and extravagance? Whenever we attempt to amend the scheme of Providence and to interfere with the government of the world, we had need be very circumspect lest we do more harm than good.”

— Benjamin Franklin, signer of the Declaration of Independence; diplomat; printer; scientist; signer of the Constitution; governor of Pennsylvania.

Benjamin Franklin, letter to Peter Collinson, May 9, 1753, *The Works of Benjamin Franklin*, edited by Jared Sparks, Boston: Hilliard Gray, 1840, 7:67.

(whom I am very fond of) to a high position; he was both careful and immediate to respond that my friend had indeed earned it over his colleagues. I later reflected to Danielle what a wise response that was. Lest I had inferred something other in the presence of his staff, Darrell let it be known he must be (and was) impartial in his use of power. Proverbs 17:26 states conclusively this same principle of Exodus 23:3, albeit in the opposite way:

“It is also not good to fine the righteous, nor to strike the noble for their uprightness.”

To unjustly tax a wealthy person who has in no way broken the law is for government to *“fine the righteous.”* It is to *strike* an innocent person for no biblical reason.

C. SUMMARY OF POINT

Civil government needs to be just and impartial to all citizens. In his insightful book, *Politics According to the Bible*, Dr. Wayne Grudem best states how governments should judge rich members of their state:

“The question is not whether someone is rich or poor, but whether someone has done good or evil. It is wrong to punish those who have not done evil.”

It is not the axis of being rich or poor that God calls a state to arbitrate. Rather it is the axis of good versus evil that is its biblical calling and responsibility to uphold. Such biblically aberrant policies negatively affect a country in terms of its economic outcomes.

III. GOVERNMENT AND THE POOR

Lest we prematurely conclude that this is a lopsided Bible study that is concerned only for the needs of the wealthy, all believers are indeed directed *individually* and as corporate bodies (i.e. families and churches) by numerous passages in Scripture to help the poor. Note this in the three passages that follow—but notice too what is omitted from each of them:

“But now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.” (Romans 15:25–26)

“They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.” (Galatians 2:10)

“But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?” (1 John 3:17)

What is in common with all the biblical passages on helping the poor?

Of all the passages that instruct individual believers, heads of households, families, and churches to help the bereft, none of them ever mention civil government.

Scripture never suggests that civil government is the curing institution for poverty. And closely related, Scripture does not support the idea of governments taking from the rich to meet the needs of the poor. That’s right, my



friend. The responsibility for providing a societal safety net falls to God's other ordained institutions.

A. GOD'S DESIGN FOR A SOCIETAL SAFETY NET

In 1 Timothy 5:3–16 Paul engages in a lengthy discussion regarding God's perspective on social safety nets as they specifically pertain to meeting the needs of widows. The overarching principles that are contained in this passage reveal, in conjunction with those previously listed herein, a hierarchical order, a theological construct if you will, for the proper institutional dispatch of resources to meet the needs of the poor. The needs of the poor are to be met first by individual believers, then heads of household, and then *and only then* does the responsibility fall to the church (if for some other, legitimate reason individual children or grandchildren, or if not them, the heads of households cannot provide for their own). Again, nowhere in Scripture does the responsibility default to the state. (Notice I did not yet mention the place for the institution of commerce in this ordering.) Further, the reason God does not include civil government in the task of meeting the needs of the poor is because He did not intend for it to accomplish this task.

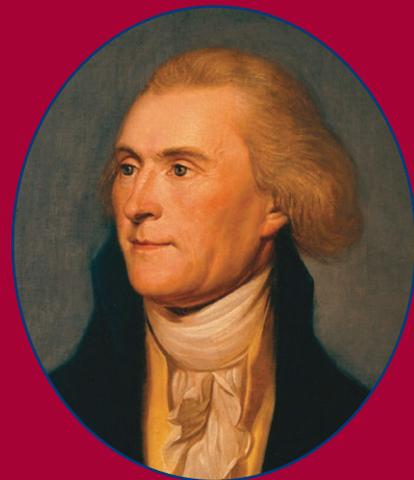
When governments begin to hand out money in an attempt to “solve” poverty, they create a permanent dependent class.

They then must continue to hand out that money as if that solves poverty. The reason it is not the solution is twofold: First, it leads to the state's insolvency, as we are witnessing in America's runaway entitlement programs. Second,

it serves to keep the dependent person dependent, and pretty much guarantee that they will remain poor. The only real solution to poverty is for the out-of-work person to get a job and keep it. *Therefore all permanent solutions to poverty must have nothing less than that objective in mind.* This is the biblically informed program of the Union Rescue Mission (URM). A not-for-profit corporation incentivized by government tax write-offs, they provide temporary shelter while evangelizing the desperate heart and training the disconsolate soul of the inner and outer man, respectively. The URM is not only a voice for spiritual renewal but vocational training since the two are usually connected to endemic poverty.

Herein represented in action is a strategy for helping the poor in ways that are biblically founded and proven effective. You may have noticed that in the hierarchical order of creating a scripturally based social safety net that the institution of commerce was missing. That is because their job in combating poverty is to be the job provider, which is intended by God to sustain the rehabbed individual—and everyone else—from reentering or entering poverty. I frequent a barbershop where those who cut my hair are on parole from prison, learning a vocation, on their way back to society. Danielle and I stay at a hotel in DC where the same is true of most of the employees. These business establishments are sensitive to what God would have them do since He ordained the institution of commerce in the first place! As noted specifically in earlier studies in this series and herein, it is not the job of civil government to provide for the poor directly but to incentivize the institutions of marriage, family, church, and commerce to pick up the

Thomas Jefferson



“I think myself that we have more machinery of government than is necessary, too many parasites living on the labor of the industrious.”

— Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States; signer of the Declaration of Independence; diplomat; governor of Virginia; secretary of state.

Thomas Jefferson, *letter to William Ludlow*, Sept. 6, 1824, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, edited by H.A. Washington, New York, H.W. Derby, 1861, 7:378.





Alexander Hamilton



slack and create the safety net in ways respective of the strength of their institutional calling by God.

B. THE SOLUTION OF WORK

When God placed Adam in the garden, He told him to work it and keep it (Genesis 2:15). Extremely important is this: This command to man to work is given *before the fall*. That is to say the necessity of work is not a result of the curse, rather it is a vital aspect of man possessing in his inner self a sense of value and worth. (This theological point is also developed in part 7 of this series.) God designed man to work in order to achieve a sense of self-worth and dignity! Extremely, extremely important is this: It follows that civil governments must incorporate this biblical truth into all policy formation pertaining to a sustainable solution to poverty! It follows that any programs by any of the five ordained institutions that do not lead to an individual working to provide for himself will only serve to further cripple the individual. Further, it follows that entitlement programs, since they are *not* informed by Genesis 2:15, only serve to prolong and create an addiction to poverty. Every public servant needs to be sure of this:

Entitlements do not provide for the poor what God says are their prescriptive needs!

Notice what Paul said in this regard to the believers in 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12 and 2 Thessalonians 3:10.

“And to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you

will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.”

“For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.”

Since labor is the key to self-dignity, these passages, along with Proverbs 16:26, place a high value on work, stating that the need to eat is to be viewed as an incentive to make a living for one’s self.

A worker’s appetite works for him, for his hunger urges him on.

C. PERSONAL APPLICATION

On a more personal note of application, as a father or mother you must teach, train, and demand that your children value and perform hard work. Danielle and I made our boys run their own businesses successfully during their high school years. Such parenting has paid huge dividends in terms of their respective, huge career successes today.

D. GOVERNMENT AND EQUALITY

During a Mayor’s Prayer Breakfast in Anchorage, my now good friend Mayor Dan Sullivan thanked the various churches for stepping up and opening shelters for the poor. In doing so, he underscored what I am saying here. It was a beautiful illustration of what believers will do when called on by governmental leaders to be faithful to their responsibilities. What the church can accomplish in aiding the poor is more efficacious than what government can possibly do! To the converse of this

“The public necessities must be satisfied; this can only be done by contributions of the whole society ...”

— Alexander Hamilton, Revolutionary War general; signer of the Constitution; author of the Federalist Papers; secretary of the U.S. Treasury.

Alexander Hamilton, *The Continentalist* 6, April 18, 1782.



wonderful Alaskan illustration is a biblically naive government that believes in economic equality and attempts to achieve it by taking from the rich and giving to the poor and by unjustly taxing the rich at a higher percentage of income and creating “entitlements” for the poor. God, as we have seen, does not sanction such behavior, nor does it work.

Allow me to illustrate: If one thousand people with no money were moved into a new city and the government gave every person \$10,000, it would not be long until some people had more than others. The only way to maintain this “economic equality” would be for the government to continually tax those with more money and give entitlements to those with less. For the government to continually engage in this means it must reward bad habits (overspending, poor use of time, unwise decisions, wastefulness, etc.) and penalize good behavior (industriousness, hard work, frugality, wise decisions, etc.)—*the exact opposite of what God states about the purpose of government in 1Peter 2:14! It is to reward those who do evil and punish those who do good!* In this hypothetical city, it wouldn’t be long until those with the greater capacity for wealth creation moved somewhere else—and then the whole city would spiral into poverty. This is exactly the phenomena that is occurring in socialist California, where thousands of successful businesses have left and are leaving the state. Make no mistake here:

“Economic equality” is a myth that is unsustainable and always thwarted by its own unintended consequences.

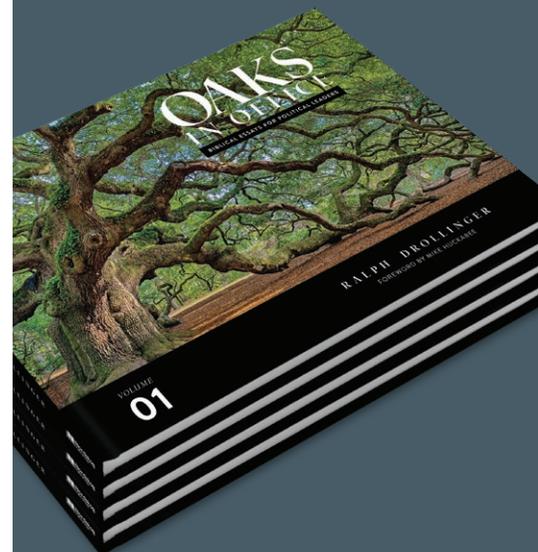
It is foolhardy for any public servant to try to recreate God’s purpose for and means of government to somehow achieve this flawed and impossible objective.

IV. SUMMARY

For government to use its power in the aforementioned, socialistic way in an attempt to “solve” poverty and help the poor is to be biblically naive. It is God’s intention for government to spend its energies on keeping the playing field level, likened to a referee—only the game is called *Free-Market Economy*—wherein evil is penalized and good is rewarded. Governments must stand aside and allow the stronger citizens to help the weaker ones individually and personally via their families and churches and via the jobs they create with their businesses. Lest you believe that the aforementioned will not step up, and government must step in, you are dead wrong: They will because they are created by God and bear His image, and part of His image is His compassion for those in need! I am always brought to tears when in tragedy I see this side of man come to the surface—the imago dei side of man—which always rises up with the greatest of courage and compassion, in fact heroic levels of courage and compassion, to help his fellow man in need. What a testament to God’s imprimatur on the souls of man!

Herein is God’s blueprint and solution for helping the poor; for sure the solution lies not in a government-driven redistribution of wealth, i.e. socialism.

Next week in part 9, we look at God’s design for a societal safety net.



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