

Thoughts on Socialism, Equality, and Need

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We've heard a lot about socialism these days. I've been thinking about these things from a biblical perspective. Is there any Word from God about Christians in a world full of need? Does the Bible teach socialism?

No, not if socialism is the forcible redistribution of wealth so that all people can be economically equal. Yet we do see a voluntary sharing and equality encouraged. In Acts 2:45 we see the earliest church voluntarily redistributing wealth and goods to meet the needs of those who had less.

A passage that has both intrigued and challenged me is 2 Corinthians 8:13-14: "For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that their may be equality." Paul was surely talking primarily about material needs, but does this principle also apply to spiritual needs?

Paul was a good person to comment on the relative needs and means of the churches. He had a rare "bird's eye view" of the situation. His view was not provincial or cloistered by the walls of a local church. Paul's concern for the poor saints in Jerusalem and his familiarity with the material resources (or lack thereof) of his churches was based on his travels and visits. He was truly a world Christian fully aware of both material and spiritual needs in the churches.

It must have pained the apostle to visit a church where the believers lived in luxury after he had just spent time with those struggling to eat one good meal a day. What could he say? He could not pull a biblical trump card to demand that they distribute their wealth. There is none. In the context of the same passage, Paul championed grace-giving (2 Cor. 9:7-15). All he could do is remind people that there are great needs—an inequality in wealth—and there is a moral responsibility for believer to help believer, for one child of God to help his brother or sister.

I live in the United States which is well insulated from the needs of my fellow believers around the world. Occasionally, an image of a hungry child will appear on my new large-screen TV, but the remote is a great conscience appeaser—if I am fast enough with it. But I also know that these appeals on TV, though supplying meals, often or inadequately meet the greater spiritual hunger in these people.

However, when I go to India or Africa, I see believers struggling to purchase bus fare to our conferences or sleeping on dirt floors so they can receive food for their souls, and yes, three good meals a day too. I see a pastor, a member of the FGA, who works two jobs in a capital city in Africa so he can support from his own salary 19 rural churches and pastors (that is, Free Grace churches and pastors). Of the 19 pastors, he is the only one who owns an automobile.

I have seen pastors in Russia who have had to place their children in an orphanage because they can't feed them. I have impulsively given an Indian pastor a small gift which was to me almost spare change only to hear him say "Do you know that you have just given me two month's income?" When I told him I threw my Christian magazines away, he urged me to give them to him because his church would bind them and pass them around for everyone to read.

So it is hard when I come back to my life in the United States--I admit it is hard to come back to *my own home* and sit in front of my large-screen TV which would have paid for a year's salary for most of the pastors I have just trained. Or would have paid for some valuable theology books for every pastor present. It is hard to go to my church and pray for people's colds which *will* get better or their knees which *will* get worse.

But financial and material needs aside, it is hard for me to see brothers and sisters who know the free grace of God, who really understand the glorious gospel of grace, who have experienced liberty from bondage, yet who don't seem too concerned for brothers and sisters who don't have a decent Bible, live in fear of uncertainty about their salvation, or live under a yoke of bondage of legalism. I guess it is "out of sight, out of mind." No remote is even needed.

Let me stop dancing around what I really want to say, because I've run out of time to write. I don't believe in forced socialism, or foisting on others false guilt. But among those who would read this are resources that can help a pastor or believer who *finally has understood grace and is excited about sharing it*; there are resources among us that can give to that need or go to that need. I'm not even talking about material things first. I am talking about giving or sending teaching, books, or resources to help them grow and go. We can be the bulge in the belly of overabundance or a hearty meal to a starving soul.

You can't legislate equality, but you can appeal for it. I challenge you to adopt the New Testament spirit of equality. I challenge you to take the grace message you are so well-versed in and share it in person, or through literature, or however God leads, with a church, or a brother, or sister across the seas who has not heard or understood it. What we are gorging on to the point of indigestion, they will savor like fruit from the tree of life.

I believe the FGA is the perfect place for resources to meet needs. Let's keep the conversation going.