

Christianity has always had a complicated relationship with civil government, yet as American culture races away from biblical values at an alarming rate, Christians are being forced to think more carefully about what the Bible says about government than they have in the recent past. In *Just Thinking: About the State*, Darrell Harrison and Virgil Walker have provided an invaluable tool to help Christians do just that. The greatest strength of this book is its reliance on the sufficiency and authority of God’s Word in thinking carefully about relevant issues such as the nature of government, capitalism, abortion, politics, ethnicity, and elections. The Bible is not silent about civil government—indeed, God himself instituted it—so Darrell and Virgil wisely and pastorally guide modern Christians to think biblically about these matters in an age when so many extrabiblical ideologies battle for our attention. This is a must-read resource to help Christians discern how to live faithfully in their dual citizenship in the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of men.

—**Scott Aniol, PhD**

Associate Professor and Director of Doctoral
Worship Studies | Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Rooted deeply in the Scriptures, this book tackles the difficult issues for Christians to balance the role of government and their faith. It’s a great resource for any believer who wants to enter such discussions with facts and not just emotions.

—**Dr. Curt Dodd**

Senior Pastor | Westside Church

Darrell and Virgil are the familiar voices on *Just Thinking*— the most popular and most influential long-form evangelical podcast in the world. They have a well-deserved reputation for careful analysis, bold clarity, biblical wisdom, and quotable phrasing. Those same qualities distinguish their writing, and that makes this book not only a joy to read but also an indispensable resource—especially in an age of increasing conflict between Christ and Caesar.

—**Phil Johnson**

Executive Director | Grace to You

The ministry that God has entrusted to me is known for engaging false doctrine and false teachers, but I have never witnessed anything so destructive that has been accepted so quickly and so uncritically by so many evangelicals as the social justice movement. It has swept into the church like wildfire and has, to varying degrees, been promoted by voices long been trusted as theologically conservative stalwarts of truth. Many Christians are confused as to how to even understand these issues, much less how to biblically engage them—understandably so. Many are afraid of being called a racist if they do not acquiesce to the prevailing cultural winds. This is why I am so profoundly grateful for *Just Thinking: About the State*. In this book, Darrell Harrison and Virgil Walker engage hot-button issues with intellectual rigor and theological precision. They pull no punches and make no apologies in diagnosing the root problems our society faces and in calling Christians to boldly stand on God’s unchanging Word. I am honored to count both Darrell and Virgil as personal friends and could not be more enthusiastic in commending this tremendously helpful resource to you.

—Justin Peters
Justin Peters Ministries

There is not one single aspect of the Christian life for which a biblical worldview is not both necessary and practical. Every believer in Jesus Christ had better think critically, biblically, and faithfully about engagement in today’s ever-changing public square. Darrell Harrison and Virgil Walker make this case abundantly clear in *Just Thinking: About the State*. It is a must-read for any serious Christian.

—Ryan Helfenbein
Executive Director | Standing for Freedom Center at Liberty University

In this excellent work, Darrell Harrison and Virgil Walker faithfully contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). As we journey onward toward our eternal home, where we will finally and forever be under the visible reign of King Jesus, we must keep our eyes fixed on Christ and exercise biblical discernment along the journey. This is the time for the church to live out the gospel in the public sphere, and Darrell Harrison and Virgil Walker point out the Christian’s call while urging us to be faithful in this age of compromise.

—Josh Buice
Pastor | Pray’s Mill Baptist Church
Founder and President | G3 Ministries

So nice, I had to read it twice! As expected, Darrell and Virgil pull no punches in *Just Thinking: About the State*. It is convicting, biblical, and at times, uncomfortably uncompromising. The church needs this book, and we need it now.

—**John L. Cooper**

Singer | Skillet

Author | *Awake and Alive to Truth*

Host | *Cooper Stuff* podcast

The unpredictable events of the past five years—and especially the last year and a half—have caused believers to give unprecedented consideration to Scripture’s teaching on the Christian’s relationship to government. Spheres of authority, church-state relations, the Christian’s role in the political process, avoiding both escapism and transformationalism, giving to Caesar what is his and to God what is His, showing compassion without devolving into the social gospel, matters of race, justice, and church unity—it has been overwhelming! So many have had to confront these issues in more practical ways than we could have imagined.

Through this tumultuous time, over and over again I have retreated to the sound, biblical counsel of my dear brothers Darrell and Virgil. They have been God’s gifts of courage and faithfulness in a season of the church’s confusion, obfuscation, and mission drift—prophetic voices of reason to a church gone astray. This book represents the best of that sane, Scripture-saturated commentary that has blessed so many. How must believers bring the Bible to bear on our political views, our participation in the public square, and the hot-button social issues confronting the church today? *Just Thinking: About the State* is an invaluable resource for answering those questions. Read and be blessed.

—**Mike Riccardi, PhD**

The Master’s Seminary Pastor | Local Outreach Ministries,
Grace Community Church

Darrell Harrison and Virgil Walker have served the church well in this superb foundational work as they encourage biblical thinking about the issues of government that are increasingly relevant in our day. May God use their efforts to help shape the thinking of our generation so that generations to come may benefit and Christ’s kingdom may expand and advance.

—**Anthony Mathenia**

Pastor | ChristChurch

Just
Thinking:

about the state

Just Thinking:

about the state

Darrell Harrison & Virgil Walker



Just Thinking: About the State

Copyright © 2021 Founders Press

All rights reserved. Written permission must be secured from the author to use or reproduce any part of this book, except for brief quotations in critical review or articles.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations taken from the (NASB®) New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved. www.lockman.org.

Scripture quotations marked NASB taken from the (NASB®) New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved. www.lockman.org.

Scripture quotations marked ESV are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked ERV are from the Easy-to-Read® Bible, copyright © 1987, 2004 Bible League International. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.®

Scripture quotations marked NRSV are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Published by Founders Press

P.O. Box 150931 • Cape Coral, FL • 33915

Phone: (888) 525-1689

Electronic Mail: officeadmin@founders.org

Website: www.founders.org

Cover design by Jaye Bird LLC

Typesetting by InkSmith Editorial Services

ISBN: 978-1-943539-23-9

Dedication

To my parents, Barbara and Samuel, who exemplified for me a godly work ethic and taught me never to make excuses, regardless how adverse the situation or circumstance.

~ Darrell

To my parents, Clarence (Benny) and Mary, who taught me to keep God first, to work hard, and to never stop learning.

~ Virgil

Contents

Foreword by John MacArthur.....	ix
Introduction by Tom Ascol.....	1
1. Government	5
2. Socialism.....	27
3. Capitalism	45
4. A Social Savior	59
5. The Born-Alive Act	73
6. Black Lives Matter and Abortion.....	89
7. Politics and the Black Church	105
8. Reparations	119
9. The Equality Act	139
10. Elections	157
About the Authors	183
Scripture Index	185

Foreword

John MacArthur

Pastor | Grace Community Church, Author,
Teacher | Grace To You, Chancellor | The Master's University

“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s,
and to God the things that are God’s.” (Mark 12:17)

Jesus’s famous statement about taxpaying recognizes that there is a legitimate role for secular civil government. Within the realm of Caesar’s legal authority, believers have a duty to submit to the government even when it might be unpleasant or costly—and even if Caesar isn’t particularly likeable. Christians in first-century Rome literally lived and worked in Caesar’s immediate neighborhood while Nero was emperor. According to Philippians 4:22, a few believers even worked or lived in his household. Nero was one of the most notoriously cruel and thoroughly wicked rulers who ever sat on any earthly throne. But Paul’s epistle to that congregation made clear that a Christian’s obedience to Caesar’s legitimate power is nevertheless a divine mandate. Christians are not supposed to be political insurrectionists. “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment” (Romans 13:1–2).

At the same time, Jesus’s words about rendering to Caesar also implicitly draw a clear line of demarcation between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world. “The things that are God’s” do not belong to Caesar. Furthermore, Christ is Lord over all (Acts 10:36), meaning he is the supreme authority in the universe, even

over Caesar. So when the whims and edicts of civil government are clearly at odds with the law of God, or when Caesar tries to overrule and supplant the sovereign prerogatives of Christ, we must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

A time is coming, of course, when all the kingdoms of this world will be annexed and absorbed into the eternal kingdom of Christ, and he will reign in perfect righteousness forever and ever (Revelation 11:15). In the meantime, however, there always will be tension between the two realms. Caesar, of course, wants to consolidate everything under his authority. Civil government—no matter how well intentioned it may be at the start—will eventually attempt to seize and exercise authority over “the things that are God’s.”

Even in a constitutional republic founded with safeguards designed to keep the government out of church doctrine and polity, Caesar relentlessly tries to encroach into “the things that are God’s.” The government’s endless push into church affairs has never been more obvious than currently in America. Legislation is in place (and more is pending) that would hand Caesar power to regulate whom churches can employ and what they can require of staff and church members with regard to sexual purity, gender identity, abortion, the role of women, and a growing list of similar moral issues. Politicians have even proposed legislation raising the charge of “hate speech” to try to silence parts of the biblical message.

Meanwhile, government schools routinely indoctrinate children (starting in preschool) with amoral values. Government-mandated sex education purposely denigrates biblical standards and aggressively promotes the normalization of a list of sexual perversions too obscene to name in polite society. The government has made it easy for children to obtain birth control, sex-change counseling, or an abortion—all without their parents’ knowledge, even while they are deemed too young to be given an aspirin from the school nurse without a parent’s permission.

Mandatory government-funded programs inculcate students and employees in the doctrines of critical race theory, a pernicious and quasi-religious stew of ethnic resentment steeped in neo-Marxist

ideology. Courts and legislatures throughout the Western world have actively promoted the secularization of all society. They have championed gender fluidity. They have tried to ennoble various sexual perversions. They have forced Christian shop owners out of business over matters of conscience. And they have adopted an extensive agenda of public policies that are overtly hostile to biblical values.

Governments across North America used the COVID-19 crisis to impose severe restrictions on practically every facet of Christian worship. For months on end, arbitrary and frequently changing rules limited everything from congregational singing to group prayer meetings (even in private homes). Some governors banned religious gatherings completely. In Canada, pastors were arrested and jailed—in one case for several weeks. A church where people continued to gather was forcibly closed, barricaded, and surrounded by armed guards who kept worshipers away.

But the most alarming threat to the spiritual health and liberty of the church comes not from the government and not merely from the spiraling secularization of popular culture. A danger more serious by orders of magnitude arises from within the church itself, because contemporary evangelicals have cultivated an atmosphere of blithe indifferentism in their own movement. Critical thinking and careful discernment are generally scorned within the evangelical movement today. Church leaders painstakingly study culture so they can imitate what is popular, rather than confronting the cultural drift with biblical truth. One clear example of this is the growing acceptance of critical race theory within the church. This is occurring even while careful thinkers in the secular academic world have begun pointing out that critical theory is a dangerous quasi-Marxist ideology whose completely predictable effect is to provoke deeper division and aggravate more animosity between already-adverse people groups. The only reason Christians would have for adopting the tenets of critical race theory or intersectional feminism—even as supposedly “helpful analytical tools”—is because postmodern evangelicals have a pathological craving reminiscent of the Israelites in 1 Samuel 8:20 who wanted to be like the surrounding nations.

Let's not forget that "friendship with the world is enmity with God" (James 4:4). The church must awaken to these trends and respond appropriately, resisting the temptation to fight with carnal weapons as if this were merely a bureaucratic battle or a political skirmish against flesh-and-blood enemies. It decidedly is not that. "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). That speaks of unseen spiritual adversaries.

So our duty as the people of God is not to overthrow Caesar through armed insurgency. The church as a body must not abandon its true ministry as a herald of the gospel in order to become a rival political force. "The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh" (2 Corinthians 10:4). What we are embroiled in is an ideological and spiritual conflict. And the main duty of Christ's church is to keep proclaiming the truth. That is how "we destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ" (v. 5).

The whole point the apostle Paul was making when he wrote those words is that biblical truth (starting with the gospel of Jesus Christ) is the only effective weapon we have in the ongoing conflict between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of Christ. The truth of Scripture alone can do what no carnal warfare, no candidate, no boycott, and no partisan political party will ever accomplish. It has "divine power to destroy strongholds"—namely, those ideological prisons Caesar uses to thwart the ministry of Christ's church.

Darrell Harrison and Virgil Walker understand these things clearly. Their regular discussions on the Just Thinking podcast have established them as two of today's most thoughtful, careful, biblically anchored analysts when it comes to government policies, ideological trends, political movements, and social manias—and how such things are currently affecting the church. These are voices the church of today desperately needs to hear and heed. And this volume distills and preserves some of the best of their thinking about biblical Christianity, how we should understand the role of civil government,

and how we need to respond to the ideological mess of pottage the church has all but traded its birthright for.

As every listener to their podcasts knows, Darrell and Virgil do their homework. As you might expect, their writing—like the podcast—is full of rich insight, biblical understanding, and practical help regarding tricky and often misunderstood issues. My sincere hope is that this volume will turn out to be just the first of a long series.

John MacArthur

Acknowledgments

From Darrell: My sincere thanks and appreciation to John MacArthur, Phil Johnson, Jay Flowers, and Jeremiah Johnson for providing me with godly wisdom and counsel over the course of this project, and to my wife, Melissa—my very own Katharina von Bora—who joyfully encouraged and supported me every step of the way.

From Virgil: My sincere thanks and appreciation to my wife, Tomeka; your support always begins with prayer. Thanks to our three children, who still believe their dad is cool despite his nerdiness. Thanks to Dawain Atkinson for his visionary action. I'll never forget it, brother.

Introduction

Tom Ascol

Pastor | Grace Baptist Church

President | Founders Ministries and The Institute of Public Theology

The Puritan John Flavel rightly noted that “the Providence of God is like Hebrew words—it can be read only backwards.” That is because God is always doing more in any one moment or season than we can fully appreciate. Only later, as we look back, can we begin to appreciate some of the depth and breadth of His gracious work on behalf of His people during those moments that have long since passed.

That is how I think about this book by Darrell Harrison and Virgil Walker. Who could have imagined all that God was doing when Dawain Atkinson convinced them to team up for a podcast that would make *Just Thinking* an almost household brand among conservative evangelicals? Their serious, thoughtful, and biblical engagement with topics ranging from “whiteness,” Black Lives Matter, and racial reconciliation to biblical unity, assurance of salvation, and worldliness in the church has captivated the minds of believers and unbelievers who, like the two of them, want to be challenged to just think for themselves.

Another strand of God’s providence involves my own friendship with Darrell and Virgil. I can say that I knew them before their podcast began, but just barely. I learned of Darrell from the articles he posted on his blog, which led me to reach out to him by phone in

hopes of encouraging him but with the result of being on the receiving end of great encouragement. Virgil and I had mutual friends, so we had “almost” known each other for a while. I knew about him for a year or so before I actually got to know him.

Becoming acquainted with these two faithful men and developing a friendship with them both has been one of God’s great blessings to me in this latter stage of my life. Some people are easier to love at a distance than up close. That is not true of Darrell and Virgil. They “wear well.” That is, the more you know them, the more you come to appreciate and love them. Their humble devotion to Christ, submission to Scripture, deep fear of God, and refusal to fear people combine to make them profitable teachers and helpful guides for anyone who wants to know the Lord better and grow in the understanding and application of His Word.

Those who are familiar with their *Just Thinking* podcast already know this about Darrell and Virgil. Those who have picked up this book are about to learn that these things are indeed so. The authors have thought deeply and taught repeatedly on issues related to God and government and Christians’ responsibilities to civil authorities. In the chapters that follow, they invite readers to join them in *Just Thinking: About the State*.

Here, Darrell and Virgil have taken some issues they have addressed over the last few years in their podcast and written about them in the same bold, crisp ways they’ve discussed them for their listeners. They neither cut corners nor smooth rough edges off the truth. *Unvarnished* is an adjective that kept coming to mind as I read through these pages. The authors intentionally don’t do nuance.

Neither do they shy away from volatile subjects, as the chapter titles alone demonstrate. Where else will you find biblical treatments of “Socialism,” “A Social Savior,” “The Born Alive Act,” “Black Lives Matter and Abortion,” “Politics and the Black Church,” and “Reparations” in one book? Where the fainthearted fear to tread, Darrell and Virgil march boldly, Bibles open, with full confidence that no subject is exempt from evaluation by rigorous study of God’s written Word.

For example, in a day when more and more progressive—including many formerly conservative—Christian leaders are flirting with socialistic economic theories, Darrell and Virgil leave no doubt about their own evaluation when they say, in chapter 2 (p.42), “Socialism is a lie. It is a mirage. It is an ideology that collapses on itself because it is built on the contradiction that under the guise of morality, the pursuit of a more fair and equitable society, it is permissible to act immorally, to steal from one group of people to enrich another.”

That type of bracing plain-spokenness characterizes this book. In a day of rampant moral equivocation, the authors unapologetically chart a different course. You may not always agree with what they write, but you will have no difficulty in understanding where they stand. In other words, they let their yes be yes and their no be no.

Modern Christianity needs more of this type of direct, unequivocal communication as we navigate the contemporary challenges that face us. That is especially true in the brave new world of twenty-first-century America where godlessness is codified and immorality is celebrated by a growing number of civil authorities. How are Christians to respond? What should we do?

Well, before we do anything, we should think. And our thinking should be deeply informed and shaped by the Word of God. This book is helpful in precisely this way. It not only invokes Scripture but expounds it in order to address critical matters confronting us today as a result of unwise and sometimes tyrannical civil magistrates. By writing as they do and addressing topics related to civil government that are pressing in on God’s people, Darrell and Virgil not only provide helpful insights but also give us a model for thinking about any subject.

There are at least two ways their example in this book can serve Christians well as we follow them as they follow Christ. First, their approach to every topic they address reminds us that we are to “destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5 ESV). Again, you may not agree with all their understandings and applications of Scripture in this book, but you will do well to

follow their example in learning to bring every matter into the light of biblical teaching.

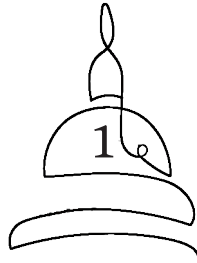
The second way Darrell and Virgil are examples to thinking Christians today is the courage they display in holding firm to the teaching of God's Word in those areas where it is extremely unpopular. In fact, simply to assert what Scripture says on certain ethical and moral issues today is to invoke the wrath of leftists. The authors have experienced this even from so-called fellow Christians. They don't talk about it much and certainly don't dwell on it (you will see a passing reference to it in chapter 7, "Politics and the Black Church"), but I am aware of some of the castigation both men have experienced because of their unwavering commitment to the truth of Scripture. Undaunted, they keep pressing on, commending God's Word. In the process, they remind God's people of our Savior's words in Matthew 5:11–12, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (ESV).

So, read this book and be encouraged, challenged, and instructed in the ways of Jesus Christ by two of His choicest servants. As you do, pray that the Lord will help you to think carefully and biblically about the governmental authorities He has placed over us.

Tom Ascol

Cape Coral, FL

January 29, 2021



Government

On March 22, 2019, Veronique de Rugy, senior research fellow at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University, published an article on the American Institute for Economic Research website titled “France Is the Socialist Future We Should Dread.”¹ In her article, de Rugy contrasts the French model of socialism with that of Cuba and Sweden and says the following regarding the detrimental realities of harboring a paternalistic view of the role of government in society:

France was once a role model for what big government can do for its people. But it has become an embarrassing example since “The Gilets Jaunes” (French for “yellow vests”) took to the streets to demonstrate against the insane amount of taxes they pay. These guys aren’t upper class. They are the people who have until now supported the policies that are inevitable when you have the government providing so many services and involved so deeply in so much of the economy.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) released its annual Revenue Statistics report this week,

¹ Veronique de Rugy, “France Is the Socialist Future We Should Dread,” American Institute for Economic Research, March 22, 2019, <https://www.aier.org/article/france-is-the-socialist-future-we-should-dread>.

and France topped the charts, with a tax take equal to 46.2% of GDP in 2017. That's more than Denmark (46%), Sweden (44%) and Germany (37.5%), and far more than the OECD average (34.2%) or the U.S. (27.1%, which includes all levels of government).

France doesn't collect that revenue in the ways you might think.

Despite the stereotype of heavy European income taxes on the rich, Paris relies disproportionately on social-insurance, payroll and property taxes. Social taxes account for 37% of French revenue; the OECD average is 26%. Payroll and property taxes contribute 3% and 9%, compared to the OECD averages of 1% and 6%.

As a reminder, the payroll tax is very regressive; it consumes a larger share of low-and middle-class earners than rich people. In addition: then Europe adds a regressive consumption tax, the value-added tax. In France, VAT and other consumption taxes make up 24% of revenue, and that's on the low side compared to an OECD average of 33%. Consumption taxes often fall hardest on the poor and middle class, who devote a greater proportion of their income to consumption.

To be sure, the spending is also more regressive in France in that the biggest share goes to the middle and low-income earners. But it is a stupid system in which you tax one group to redistribute to that same group.

Add one more increase to an already high (and regressive) gas tax in France to the existing 214 taxes and duties and the people went nuts. They have been protesting continuously since November 17th, 2018. I don't condone the violence, but I understand why the protestors are so furious.

What Veronique de Rugy has to say is critical to helping us understand the truth about what a socialist government looks like. What is happening in France as its citizens embrace a socialist model of government is beginning to happen in America as well, particularly among the vast numbers of young people who are lining up to support political candidates who hold the same vision of regressive and redistributive government.

Not only is that vision of the role of government being embraced to an increasing degree in America *as a nation* (as evidenced, for example, by the fact that in the 2020 presidential election, at least one candidate was described as a “Democratic Socialist”²), it is also being embraced within certain elements of the evangelical church.

An Evangelical Issue

A case in point is what is known as the Poor People’s Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival. The campaign is led by the Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II, one of the leading evangelical social justicians in protestant evangelicalism today.³

In April 2018, the Poor People’s Campaign produced a white paper titled “The Souls of Poor Folk: Auditing America 50 Years after the Poor People’s Campaign Challenged Racism, Poverty, the War Economy/Militarism, and Our National Morality.” This report contains three “mission statements,” the first of which was originally put forth in 1968 by an organization known as the Committee of 100 and titled “Statements of Demands for Rights of the Poor”:

We come to you as representatives of Black, Indian, Mexican-American, Puerto-Rican, and white-Americans who are the too long forgotten, hungry and jobless outcasts in this land of plenty. We come because poor fathers and mothers want a house to live in that will protect their children against the bitter winter cold, the searing heat of summer and the rain that now too often comes in through the cracks in our roofs and walls. We have come here to say to you that we don’t think it’s too much to ask for a decent place to live in at reasonable prices in a country with a gross national product of 800 billion dollars. We don’t think it’s too radical to want to help choose the type of housing and the location. We don’t think it’s asking for pie in the sky to want to live in neighborhoods where our families can live and grow up

2 Adrian Carrasquillo, “Democratic Socialists Will Have a Presidential Candidate in November,” *Newsweek*, June 24, 2020, <https://www.newsweek.com/democratic-socialists-will-have-presidential-candidate-november-1513117>.

3 “Social justicians” is our designation for those who are proponents of the modern “social justice” movement.

with dignity, surrounded by the kind of facilities and services that other Americans take for granted.⁴

It is critical to note the antecedent of the pronoun “you” that appears in the very first sentence of that mission statement. The “you” to whom the above entreaty is directed is the United States government. In fact, when you stop and reflect on the wording of the statement from the Committee of 100, it sounds a lot like a prayer. Three times in the statement the phrase “we come to you” (or “we have come to you”) is used as an introduction to the petitions the writers are adjuring the federal government to answer. But the way the statement is written, it is almost as if they were addressing their petitions to God.

Consider the government-targeted supplications of the Committee of 100 with what the Word of God says about our needs and how they are supplied—and by whom:

- “And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).
- “But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What are we to wear for clothing?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:30–33).
- “Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth” (Psalm 124:8).
- “The young lions do without and suffer hunger; but they who seek the LORD will not lack any good thing” (Psalm 34:10).

4 Sarah Anderson et al., “The Souls of Poor Folk: Auditing America 50 Years after the Poor People’s Campaign Challenged Racism, Poverty, the War Economy/Militarism, and Our National Morality,” *The Poor People’s Campaign* (Washington, DC: Institute for Policy Studies, 2018), <https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/PPC-Audit-Full-410835a.pdf>, 2.

- “For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD gives grace and glory; He withholds no good thing from those who walk uprightly” (Psalm 84:11).
- “I will raise my eyes to the mountains; from where will my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to slip; He who watches over you will not slumber. Behold, He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is your protector; the LORD is your shade on your right hand. The sun will not beat down on you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will protect you from all evil; He will keep your soul. The LORD will guard your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forever” (Psalm 121).

These wonderful promises of God do not negate a governmental role in society. Not at all. The question we’re dealing with is this: What is the proper or, more accurately, the *biblical* role of government in society?

The French Example

We began this chapter by referencing Veronique de Rugy’s analysis of French socialism. The history of that movement forms an important background to a discussion of the biblical role of government.

In 1789, the National Constituency Assembly of France adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. This document was originally drafted by Marie-Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, better known as the Marquis de Lafayette.

One of the interesting things about the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen is that it was closely modeled after the United States’ Declaration of Independence. The close adherence to the American document was no accident. It was none other than Thomas Jefferson himself, the chief architect of the Declaration of Independence, who helped Lafayette construct the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen.

In *Heaven on Earth: The Rise, Fall, and Afterlife of Socialism*, author Joshua Muravchik helps put into context the broader conversation of the role of government and the importance of Christians' developing and applying a biblical worldview of that role, particularly as that biblical worldview is contrasted against a socialist paradigm of government. Muravchik writes,

The 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen tracked the U.S. Declaration of Independence in proclaiming that the reason for government was to secure men's rights. And its designation of those rights—"liberty, property, security"—resembled the American triad of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

However, as the [French] Revolution unfolded and new constitutions were written, the French added a fourth substantive right: equality. To be sure, the Americans had proclaimed that men were "created equal," but this was not a statement of policy; it was a postulate about the nature of man and his relation to God. The French innovation was to include "equality" among the essential purposes of government.

The impetus behind this was not hard to understand. Whereas the core issue for the Americans in 1776 was political legitimacy, for the French in 1789 it was social status. . . . It was only in the dying days of the Revolution that someone came forward to argue there was a contradiction within the revolutionary agenda—that fulfilling the promise of equality would require not merely the abolition of feudal titles and privileges, but the institution of a new way of economic life in which individual ownership would be abolished and each citizen would be furnished with an identical portion of nature's bounty.⁵

What Muravchik is articulating is that what France did with its Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen is take a universal truth—and by "universal," we mean a principle or rule that applies impartially to every image-bearer of God—and genuflect to it in such a way as to turn an objective truth into a subjective one.

⁵ Joshua Muravchik, *Heaven on Earth : The Rise, Fall, and Afterlife of Socialism* (New York: Encounter, 2019), 4.

Muravchik outlined what many people, including many professing Christians, fail to understand: that there is a fundamental difference between being *created equal* and being guaranteed *equality*. The former idea is *objectively* true (Genesis 1:27; 5:2), whereas the latter concept, that each person, as stated in the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, should be furnished by the government an “identical portion of nature’s bounty,” is fundamentally unbiblical.

This philosophical shift from viewing individuals as “created equal” to guaranteeing “equality” changed the societal landscape for France as it introduced to its citizens a man-centered concept of the role of government that was wholly antithetical to its God-ordained role (see Romans 13). Consequently, today, more than 230 years after the adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, France is regarded by many as a socialist country.

The French Connection

We mentioned previously that there were three mission statements presented in the white paper published by the Poor People’s Campaign. The first, put forth by the Committee of 100 in 1968, was a plea to the government to meet people’s material needs. The second of the two statements was authored in 2018 by the Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II:

With the realities of systemic racism, systemic poverty, ecological devastation, the war economy and the often false moral narrative of Christian nationalism, we are in a moment in time which we need a deeply moral, deeply constitutional, anti-racist, anti-poverty, pro-labor, transformative fusion coalition where people of all different races, colors, and creeds come together and work together to engage in moral direct action, massive voter mobilization, and power building from the bottom up, state by state and even in the U.S. Capitol. We need this to change the narrative and insist that we will no longer engage in attention violence against the poor and other interlocking injustices that connect to poverty.⁶

6 Anderson et al., “The Souls of Poor Folk,” 3.

Evident in Barber's statement is the unmistakable aroma of an ideological porridge composed of a dash of liberation theology, a smidge of socialism, and a pinch of Marxism. But that kind of philosophical concoction is precisely what you get when you've been convinced a government exists to guarantee people *equality* in terms of equal outcomes, as opposed to ensuring that everyone is treated equally without regard to circumstances or outcomes.

The third and final mission statement of the Poor People's Campaign is similar to the first two but was written by the Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharris, co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign. Dr. Theoharris writes, "Immigrants, Muslims, homeless people, and youth are under attack. The poor are facing severe cuts to basic social services. Millions of people are living without clean water and sanitation services. Voting rights are being suppressed and wars are being waged across the world and intensifying. These and many other crises mean it is urgent we build a poor people's campaign today."⁷

Considered together, these statements from the Committee of 100, the Rev. Dr. Barber, and the Rev. Dr. Theoharris are directly related to the development of French socialism. They represent the fruit of a worldview that concurs ideologically with the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, which views *equality* as "an essential purpose of government."

The Problem of Partiality

But here's the problem: you cannot have equality without engaging in partiality. And in Scripture, partiality is sin. Consider what the following verses teach about partiality:

- "You shall not do injustice in judgment; you shall not show partiality to the poor nor give preference to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly" (Leviticus 19:15 NASB).
- "For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe" (Deuteronomy 10:17).

⁷ Anderson et al., 3.

- “For there is no partiality with God” (Romans 2:11).
- “And the spies questioned [Jesus], saying, ‘Teacher, we know that You speak and teach correctly, and You are not partial to anyone, but You teach the way of God on the basis of truth’” (Luke 20:21 NASB).
- “Opening his mouth, Peter said: ‘I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the one who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him’” (Acts 10:34–35 NASB).
- “If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the Law as violators” (James 2:8–9 NASB).

James 2:8 contains an important phrase we don’t want you to miss: “according to the Scripture.” What is the proper role of government according to the Scripture? In other words, what do the Scriptures say? What does the Word of God teach us about the role of government and its authority to confiscate and redistribute the wealth of others under the guise of creating a society of equality?

God’s Sovereignty

When you reflect objectively on the three mission statements from the Poor People’s Campaign, you’ll notice at least four themes those statements have in common:

1. The emphasis on the poor as defined by a lack or absence of certain material possessions
2. The emphasis on material possessions as the sole remedy to material poverty
3. The emphasis on government as the sole provider of that remedy
4. The absence of any reference to God and his sovereignty in allowing such situations of material poverty to exist

Let's expand on point number four for just a moment. In Deuteronomy 8, Moses charges the Israelites after their forty years in the wilderness,

You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, in order to humble you, putting you to the test, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. And He humbled you and let you go hungry, and fed you with the manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, in order to make you understand that man shall not live on bread alone, but man shall live on everything that comes out of the mouth of the LORD. (Deuteronomy 8:2–3)

Verse 3 says that God humbled the Israelites and “let” them be hungry. The Hebrew verb phrase “let you be hungry” literally means that God allowed their stomachs to be empty. The four common themes from the Poor People’s Campaign’s various mission statements bring to mind the words of C. H. Spurgeon, who, in a sermon titled “The Happy Beggar,” wrote,

There is no crime and there is no credit in being poor. Everything depends upon the occasion of the poverty. Some men are poor and are greatly to be pitied, for their poverty has come upon them without any fault of their own. God has been pleased to lay this burden upon them, and therefore they may expect to experience divine help, and ought to be tenderly considered by their brethren in Christ. Occasionally, poverty has been the result of integrity or religion, and here the poor man is to be admired or honored. At the same time, it will be observed, by all who watch with an impartial eye, that very much of the poverty about us is the direct result of idleness, intemperance, improvidence, and sin. There would probably not be one-tenth of the poverty there now is upon the face of the earth if the drinking shops were less frequented, if debauchery were less common, if idleness were banished, and extravagance abandoned.⁸

Now, given the hypersensitive milieu in which we live today, there is absolutely no doubt that many would judge those words from

⁸ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “The Happy Beggar” (Sermon 3040, delivered May 16, 1907), Spurgeon Gems, accessed June 11, 2021, <https://www.spurgeongems.org/sermon/chs3040.pdf>.

Spurgeon to be uncaring, unloving, and un-Christlike in their tone, while completely disregarding the veracity and accuracy of what he said. Nevertheless, Spurgeon is absolutely correct.

Notwithstanding that God is sovereign over everything that occurs in the world (Psalm 103:19), the fact remains that the principle of reaping and sowing is not rendered moot or impotent simply because someone is materially poor (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Remember, God shows no partiality—none—to anyone, regardless of their socioeconomic situation or circumstance. Matthew 5:45 says that the Lord “causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” The principle of reaping and sowing applies universally to every individual. That fact is clearly laid out by the apostle Paul in Galatians 6:7: “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.”

A God of Consequences

A primary reason why so many professing Christians today have such a misguided concept of the role of government in society is that they’ve completely lost sight of the fact that God is a God of consequences. The first evidence of that reality is in Genesis 2:16–17: “The Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.’” God made it clear to Adam that there would be consequences if he disobeyed and that those consequences would be severe—so severe, in fact, that they continue to reverberate throughout Adam’s progeny to this very day.

The reason we’re placing so much emphasis on this matter of consequences is that many people believe it is the role of government to come to the rescue of individuals who have violated God’s precepts and principles and, as a result, are now experiencing the consequences of their disobedience. For example, countless individuals have incurred burdensome student loan debts in pursuit of a college education. And now, because they don’t want to have to pay those loans back, they are placing their hopes in political candidates who have promised

to have those debts canceled. But Scripture teaches that we should repay all our debts, regardless of how much we may owe.

In Romans 13:8, the apostle Paul exhorts us to “owe nothing to anyone except to love one another.” Consider also Psalm 15:4, which says that God honors the person who “swears to his own hurt and does not change.” In other words, God honors those who keep their word, who keep their promises, who do whatever is necessary to follow through on their obligations and commitments, whether financial or otherwise, even if doing so would be to their own detriment and injury.

Proverbs 12:22 says, “Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal faithfully are His delight.” One way that followers of Jesus Christ can “deal faithfully” with one another is paying our debts. If you profess to be a Christian and you owe student loans, God expects you to pay those loans back. Why? Because to place that burden on the government is to cause other individuals who had nothing to do with your incurring those debts to bear the burden of your unwise decisions, and that is sin. Additionally, the question must be asked, From where—or more accurately, from *whom*—do those people think the government will get the money it needs to cancel their student loan debts in the first place? The answer: from taxpayers just like each of us, and that’s simply another form of stealing.

Created Equal vs. Guaranteed Equality

A distinction must be made between the concept of *being created equal* and the idea of *guaranteed equality*. The former is biblical and objective; the latter is unbiblical and subjective.

Nowhere in Scripture is government said to be either responsible for or obligated to ensure equality of outcomes for anyone. Wayne Grudem understands this, as he explains in his book *Politics According to the Bible*: “I cannot find any justification in Scripture for thinking that government, as a matter of policy, should attempt to take from the rich and give to the poor. I do not think that government has the responsibility or the right to attempt to equalize the differences

between rich and poor in a society. When it attempts to do so, significant harm is done to the economy and to the society.”⁹

Taking from the “haves” and redistributing their possessions to the “have-nots” is what the Bible calls stealing. In fact, God said in Leviticus 19:15 that we are to be partial neither to the poor nor to the great. You read that correctly. It is a sin to be partial to the poor. That someone is materially poor is no excuse for the government to confiscate through coercion or force of law the possessions and property that rightfully belong to someone else.

Consider the events of Exodus 35 and 36. Moses has been commanded by God to take up an offering from among the people to construct a tabernacle. In those chapters, a significant theme is often repeated. Read carefully the following passages from those chapters, and see if you can detect what that theme is:

- “Take from among you a contribution to the LORD; whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as the LORD’S contribution: gold, silver, and bronze” (Exodus 35:5).
- “Everyone whose heart stirred him and everyone whose spirit moved him came and brought the LORD’S contribution for the work of the tent of meeting and for all its service and for the holy garments. Then all those whose hearts moved them, both men and women, came and brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and bracelets, all articles of gold, so did every man who presented an offering of gold to the LORD” (Exodus 35:21–22).
- “All the women whose heart stirred with a skill spun the goats’ hair” (Exodus 35:26).
- “The Israelites, all the men and women, whose heart moved them to bring material for all the work, which the LORD had commanded through Moses to be done, brought a freewill offering to the LORD” (Exodus 35:29).

⁹ Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 281.

- “Then Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab and every skillful person in whom the Lord had put skill, everyone whose heart stirred him, to come to the work to perform it” (Exodus 36:2).

Did you catch the references to “a willing heart,” “heart stirred,” and “freewill offering”? God wants His people to give out of compassion, not coercion.

We see another example in Matthew 19, the account of Jesus and the wealthy young ruler. The story is familiar, and in verse 21 of that chapter, Jesus says to the young man, “If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.” What is remarkable is that there are professing Christians out there today who would dare to use this verse to argue that Jesus was a socialist.

Now, notwithstanding the utter absurdity of such an assertion, let’s consider thoughtfully what Jesus said to this young man. Jesus said, “Go and sell your possessions.” Socialist Jesus would never have said such a thing as “sell *your* possessions,” because socialist Jesus would not have acknowledged that the young man’s possessions belonged to him in the first place. Socialism, by definition, does not recognize individual private property. Those possessions would have belonged to the collective, not the individual.

Additionally, socialist Jesus would never have told the young ruler to “go and *sell* your possessions.” Instead, he would have commanded him to go and *give* his possessions to the poor, which, consequently, would have made the rich man poor as well (which is the ultimate result of socialism—it makes everyone equally poor). However, this giving of wealth from the rich to the poor is exactly what some believe is moral and what the government should mandate. They have confused ensuring equality with treating everyone as equal image-bearers of God. In terms of what Scripture teaches, however, “equal” is not tantamount to “equality.”

Christians who hold to a paternalistic view of government do not understand how God designed government to function and operate.

The great Reformer John Calvin speaks to that in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, in the chapter entitled “Civil Government”: “For [government] is not merely concerned with what people eat and drink and with how life is sustained, although it includes all those things by allowing men to live together . . . that each person keeps what is his and that men live together without injury or dishonesty; in short, that among Christians there should be an open expression of religion, and that in society humanity should prevail.”¹⁰ Calvin is articulating what a biblical view of government looks like: one that treats each of its citizens equally without getting involved in the business of guaranteeing equality, which invariably leads to partiality.

But consider these words in Deuteronomy 16:19, where God says, “You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous.” God views it as an injustice to be partial to the poor as well as to the wealthy. The Hebrew word “partial” in Deuteronomy 16:19 literally means that we are not to notice, regard, observe, pay attention to, recognize, acknowledge, or make any type of distinction that would result in our having a sinful bias or prejudice either for or against someone.

The Role of the Church

God has laid the responsibility of caring for the poor upon the church, not the government. But even that comes with a caveat. For example, consider these verses in 1 Timothy 5 regarding widows:

- “Honor widows who are widows indeed” (v. 3).
- “Now she who is a widow indeed and who has been left alone, has fixed her hope on God and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day” (v. 5).
- “If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, she must assist them and the church must not be burdened, so that [the church] may assist those who are widows indeed” (v. 16).

10 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Robert White (Edinburgh, Scotland: Banner of Truth, 2014), 4.20.2.

The Greek adverb “indeed” in those verses denotes that which is a reality, as opposed to that which is pretended or conjectural. In other words, in the same way that the church is obligated to help the poor, those who would claim to be poor have a responsibility to demonstrate that they are truly in need. You can’t just say you need this or that and expect the church to come to your aid. No, you must indeed be in need, according to Scripture.

Another Scriptural caveat regarding the church meeting the needs of others is found in Galatians 6:10, where Paul writes, “So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.” As the church works in society to meet the legitimate needs of others, it should first seek to meet the needs of those who are within the church, the “household of the faith,” and then work outwardly from there.

The Government Is Not Sufficient

Contrary to what many people, including many Christians, believe, it is not the role of government to bring about equality in society. That governments should be engaged in the pursuit of social equality or social status, as was the goal of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, particularly in terms of ensuring the distribution and ownership of certain material possessions, is never mandated in Scripture. The fact is, the real cause of all poverty in this world, whether material or otherwise, is sin, and sin is something that no government has the power to rescue us from. As the apostle Paul writes in Romans 8:19–21, “For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”

No government on earth has the power to set this world free from its slavery to the corruption in which it has existed since Eve and Adam sinned in garden of Eden. And yet that is how many people today view government. They see it as being inherently endowed with the power and authority to create a world wherein all our needs—and

many of our *wants*—are met. They look to the government to create a world devoid of consequences and accountability where they can live lives of complete autonomy apart from God.

A key driver for that kind of mindset (even to the comparatively small degree it currently exists within the church) is that the church is full of people who are discontented with their lives. They want a life of comfort, ease, and convenience. They're not satisfied with what Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:8, that "if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content."

Instead of praying as Jesus taught in what is commonly referred to as the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread," they not only want the bread, they want the mayonnaise, the mustard, the lettuce, the tomato, the pickles, the onions, and the choicest, finely sliced deli meat. They want the whole sandwich served to them on a platter. And if they can't get the kind of meal they want from God, they'll just get it from the government.

But the kind of bread Jesus offers the world is the bread that leads to eternal life, not mere temporal satisfaction—which is the most any government can promise to provide its citizens. Consider Christ's words in John 6:33–34: "'For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.' Then they said to Him, 'Lord, always gives us this bread.'"

"Lord, always give us this bread"—is that your prayer today? Is that the cry of your heart—"Lord, always give me the bread that gives life to the world?" In other words, "Lord, always give me You." Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life, knows your every need and is sufficient to meet that need in and of himself. That is why Jesus said in John 6:27, "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life."

The French economist of the mid-nineteenth century, Frédéric Bastiat, said,

Self-preservation and self-development are common aspirations among all people. And if everyone enjoyed the unrestricted use of his faculties and the free disposition of the fruits of his labor,

social progress would be ceaseless, uninterrupted, and unending. But there is also another tendency that is common among people. When they can, they wish to live and prosper at the expense of others. This is no rash accusation. Nor does it come from a gloomy and uncharitable spirit. The annals of history bear witness to the truth of it: the incessant wars, mass migrations, religious persecutions, universal slavery, dishonesty in commerce, and monopolies. This fatal desire has its origin in the very nature of man—in that primitive, universal, and insuppressible instinct that impels him to satisfy his desires with the least possible pain.¹¹

The Christian understands that there will be pain in this life, and that true lasting happiness will never be a reality in this sinful world (Romans 8:18-21). The kind of happiness the church anticipates is one that no government can provide. As the Scripture declares in 2 Peter 3:13, “But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.”

Only God Provides What We Really Need

Yes, there is a role for government to play in society, but that role is not to provide cradle-to-grave security in a world that is passing away (1 John 2:15–17). Paul writes in Romans 13:4 that the governing authorities are to act as ministers of God to us for our good. Paul does not say that the government *is God*. God alone is the One who meets our every need. Paul, in speaking of God in Romans 8:32, says that “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?”

And as C. H. Spurgeon said, “In his Church, Christ teaches us that, if we have more than others, we simply hold it in trust for those who have less than we have; and I believe that some of the Lord’s children are poor in order that there may be an opportunity for their fellow-Christians to minister to them out of their abundance.”¹²

11 Frederic Bastiat, *The Law*, trans. Dean Russell (Irvington-on-Hudson, NY: Foundation for Economic Education, 1998), 5–6.

12 Charles Spurgeon, “Poverty,” *Exploring the Mind and Heart of the Prince of Preachers*, accessed June 11, 2021, http://www.spurgeon.us/mind_and_heart/quotes.

In contrast to the Poor People's Campaign, whose mission statements are saturated with entreaties to the government for redress of their collectivist concerns, Jesus Christ said in Matthew 11:28: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

In this sin-sick world in which we live, none of us will ever have all our needs met. Another way of saying that is that God never promised us equality in this life. In fact, not even in the new earth will there be equality, as each person will be rewarded based on the deeds he or she has done. We know this from Matthew 16:27, where Jesus says, "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels and will then repay every man according to His deeds."

Make no mistake, government has its place—otherwise, God would never have instituted it to begin with (Romans 13). Nevertheless, that place is never to be in the place of God. God desires that people be treated equally as bearers of his image, but equality involves partiality, and partiality—of any kind—is sin.

A Basic Theology of Government

Given that government is God's idea (Romans 13:1), it is altogether right, proper, and even necessary that God's people hold to a proper theology of government and its divinely ordained role in the world. As John Calvin said, "The purpose of temporal government [as distinct from God's spiritual kingdom] is to fit us for human society for as long as we are a part of it, to teach us to behave equitably among men, to reconcile us with one another and to promote and preserve public peace and calm."¹³

It is in light of those words from Calvin that Christians would do well to keep the following realities in mind.

God Is Sovereign

To have a clear understanding regarding a theology of government, we must begin by understanding the sovereignty of God. In Genesis 1, God creates the world and everything in it. It is God who designs

13 Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 756.

“created order,” and all things are subject to him. As an image-bearer, man is given dominion to rule God’s creation in the manner God has determined. However, God is always completely sovereign.

Consider these texts for further study: Psalms 115:3; 103:19; 135:6; Proverbs 16:4; 19:21; Philippians 2:13; Colossians 1:16; Romans 11:36.

Man’s Sinfulness Requires the Law

The result of the fall of mankind (Genesis 3) is devastating as sin begets lawlessness (1 John 3:4). As quickly as Genesis 4, we witness the first murder as mankind descends quickly into wickedness. Genesis 6:5 declares, “The LORD saw that the wickedness of mankind was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually.”

It is important to note the condition of man’s heart as sinfully wicked. Those seeking government as a complete solution for the problems of mankind must appeal to the objective standard of God rather than the subjective witness in the hearts of sinful human beings. Far too many people desire government solutions to problems that can only be remedied through transformed hearts. Chapter 6 of the 1689 London Baptist Confession captures the situation well: “By this sin our first parents fell from their original righteousness and communion with God. We fell in them, and through this, death came upon all. All became dead in sin and completely defiled in all the capabilities and parts of soul and body.”¹⁴

As an act of grace, God gives the children of Israel the law. Moses delivers the commandments of God to the people. Moses then begins to establish a “government” as a judge of the people of Israel, in Exodus 18:15–26. There, we see that government serves as a warning to do what is right and as a deterrent against evil. Jethro, Moses’s father-in-law, helps Moses establish the governance of the people. In verse 20, Jethro says, “You should explain God’s laws and teachings

¹⁴ “The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith in Modern English: Chapter 6: The Fall of Mankind, and Sin and Its Punishment,” Founders Ministries, July 30, 2018, <https://founders.org/library/1689-confession/chapter-6-the-fall-of-mankind-and-sin-and-its-punishment>.

to the people. Warn them *not to break the laws*. Tell them the right way to live and what they should do” (ERV, emphasis added).

Government Is Established to Minimize Evil

Government as established by God is to promote righteousness and punish evil. Scripture is clear about this. Consider Romans 13:1–5:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God’s servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. (NRSV)

Keep in mind that Paul isn’t writing to the church in a democratic republic. This was God’s instruction during the time of Roman rule, which could be oppressive and unfair. The act of submission to governmental authority is not the validation of government but rather an act of submission to God who is sovereign over all (Psalm 103:19).

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the difference between treating people equally and guaranteeing everyone equity?
2. Why is this distinction important to understanding the role of government?
3. What does Scripture have to say about the role of government? Does this include the redistribution of wealth?
4. What is every Christian’s responsibility toward those who are poor?
5. In what fundamental ways does the gospel differ from the role of government?