

Marc Roby: We are continuing our short break from studying theology to look at some current topics of great importance from a Christian perspective. In our last session we started looking at Karl Marx and his ideology, which is behind a number of modern movements. We made the point that since Marx had a materialist worldview, he did not recognize that the real source of all human conflict is sin. And since his diagnosis of the problem was wrong, his cure was also wrong. Dr. Spencer, how do you want to continue that discussion today?

Dr. Spencer: Well, I first want to make explicit something about Marx and his ideas that was only implicit in what we said last time.

Marc Roby: And what is that?

Dr. Spencer: That Marx was not thinking about ethics when he did his work. In other words, he didn't start by thinking that capitalism was bad and then look for what he thought would be a more ethical alternative. Rather, he analyzed history to try and discover some law that would explain what has happened in the past and would predict what will happen in the future. And he thought he had found that law with his theory about conflict between the classes. His lifelong co-worker, benefactor and friend, Friedrich Engels, said essentially that in his eulogy at Marx's funeral. He said, "Just as Darwin discovered the law of development of organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history".¹

Marc Roby: That's quite a claim – that Marx discovered the law that describes the development of human history! And did Engels say what that law is?

Dr. Spencer: Yes, he did. Let me complete the sentence I quoted from before. Engels said, "Marx discovered the law of development of human history: the simple fact, hitherto concealed by an overgrowth of ideology, that mankind must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing, before it can pursue politics, science, art, religion, etc.; that therefore the production of the immediate material means, and consequently the degree of economic development attained by a given people or during a given epoch, form the foundation upon which the state institutions, the legal conceptions, art, and even the ideas on religion, of the people concerned have been evolved, and in the light of which they must, therefore, be explained, instead of vice versa, as had hitherto been the case."²

Marc Roby: OK, that's quite a mouthful. Let me try and give a simple summary. Engels said that Marx discovered that we should analyze all of human history in terms of how people satisfied their most basic physical needs; food, shelter and clothing. Only then can we understand their ideas about everything else, including religion.

Dr. Spencer: That's a good summary. But it is also important to note that he implicitly assumed that religion is something created by man, rather than being an expression of the fact that man is created by God.

¹ See Friedrich Engels' Speech at the Grave of Karl Marx, available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1883/death/burial.htm>

² Ibid

Marx thought that the simple material needs were the most important thing. And we should note that that it is virtually the opposite of what Jesus Christ said.³ We read in Matthew 6:31-33 that Christ said, “do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”⁴

Marc Roby: Yes, Marx’s theory proves Jesus’ point fairly well. Marx was a pagan, the Greek word translated as pagan here just means a non-Jew, in other words, one who rejects the true and living God. And Marx’s theory is based entirely on people running after these things.

Dr. Spencer: Marx does nicely demonstrate Christ’s teaching, although it is ironic that Marx *was* a Jew! Just not a practicing Jew. Because he was a materialist, he completely ignores the spiritual dimension. Christ tells us that, as Christians, we are not to be focused primarily on the things of this world, although God knows that we have physical needs. Look at the original creation. God provided for all of Adam and Eve’s needs in the garden. They had to work, but their labor was sweet and productive, not frustrating. We aren’t told about shelter, but we know they didn’t have clothing.

Marc Roby: We probably don’t need to pursue that any further.

Dr. Spencer: No, we don’t. But my point is that the most important thing in the garden was fellowship with God and with one another. He is the Creator, we are his creatures made in his image. We have a spirit as well as a body and our physical needs are not the most important.

We now live in a fallen world. It was as a part of the curse following the fall that God told Adam, as we read in Genesis 3:17-19, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

Marc Roby: That paints an accurate picture of the fallen world we live in. Our work is often times frustrating and hard and we labor for so many years and then die.

³ This was pointed out by Bill Flax in an opinion piece published in Forbes magazine: “Do Marxism And Christianity Have Anything In Common?”, May 12, 2011, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/billflax/2011/05/12/do-marxism-and-christianity-have-anything-in-common/#708a95d36877>

⁴ All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® (1984 version). 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.™.

Dr. Spencer: And yet there is also grace evident in this world. God knows our basic physical needs better than any human being does; after all, he made us. And he has arranged things so that even in this fallen world, if we walk in obedience to him, our labor will produce what we need. But Jesus is telling us here that seeking God's kingdom is of first importance.

Marc Roby: Which makes perfectly good sense given the fact that we are only on this earth for a short time, but we will spend eternity either in heaven or in hell.

Dr. Spencer: And God is in charge of all that happens during this life, so seeking him first makes sense even for this life. Although your point is the most important; what happens during our 70 or 80 years here doesn't really matter in comparison with eternity.

In any event, Marx's materialism caused him to ignore the most important being in reality, God, and to reject what God has told us about human nature. Paul wrote about those who suppress the truth about God. In Romans 1:21-22 we read that "although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools". Marx's thinking was futile because he was, using the Bible's definition, a fool.

Marc Roby: And we find the Bible's definition of a fool in Psalm 14:1, where we read that "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'"

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. So Marx ignored the fact that we are all sinners and that no change in the structure of society is going to change that basic fact. We don't need a new form of government, we need to be freed from sin. And only God can accomplish that. But we do still live in this world and so the form of government we have is a legitimate concern for Christians.

The most important thing is that Christians be free to glorify God by obeying his commands to share the gospel, to work, to give to the poor, to be honest, to worship him and so on. And so it is important for us to look at Marx's theory. And we really don't need to debate whether his theory is right or wrong, we have all of the evidence we need to know for sure that his theory is wrong.

Marc Roby: Now, how would you back that statement up?

Dr. Spencer: Well, Marx believed that capitalism would simply collapse in failure and that socialism and then communism were inevitable outcomes. But he published *Das Kapital* in 1867, so we now have over 150 years of history to look back on and evaluate whether or not he was correct. And the verdict is in, Marx was wrong. There has not been a single instance of the historical progression that Marx predicted occurring anywhere on earth. We don't really want to take time to go through all of the reasons why he was wrong, but I'll mention one because it is so important in some of the discussions going on today.

Marc Roby: What reason is that?

Dr. Spencer: Well, Marx essentially assumed a fixed amount of wealth. He assumed that if the bourgeoisie, that is the owners of the factories and so on, get richer, it must be that the workers get poorer. But that is simply false. New and better products and services lead to an increase in the overall wealth in the world. In fact, the worldwide gross domestic product, or GDP, which is

a measure of total production, is estimated to have been about \$183 billion at the time of Christ. It increased to about \$643 billion by the year 1700, which is a 251% increase over that 1700-year span. The industrial revolution increased the rate of growth so that by 1870 the GDP was \$1.92 trillion, or \$1,920 billion, which is almost a 200% increase in just 170 years. In 2015 the GDP was \$108 trillion, which is more than a 5,500% increase in the last 145 years.⁵

Marc Roby: That's astonishing.

Dr. Spencer: It is astonishing, and the biggest reason for the massive increase in capital over the last roughly 150 years is, as Ben Shapiro notes, “the enshrinement of individual rights, and the advent of protection for private property – the roots of capitalism”.⁶

So it is entirely possible for both the workers *and* the owners of industry to see their wealth increase. It isn't like you and me sharing a pie by dividing it into two pieces. In that case, the only way for my piece to get larger is for your piece to get smaller, or vice versa. But that isn't what is going on in terms of wealth. It is not a zero-sum situation. And capitalism has arguably increased the wealth of *more* people far more than any other development in human history.

Marc Roby: And yet we certainly hear a lot these days about the 1% and the 99%.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, we do. And we may return to that topic in more detail in a later session, it is an example of what might be called a neo-Marxist ideology and is a very destructive one. But for now just consider the following simple illustration. Suppose I own a corporation that is initially worth a million dollars, and you are one of my employees and make \$50,000 a year.

Marc Roby: Why can't I be the owner?

Dr. Spencer: Because I'm telling the story. But now suppose that the corporation does exceptionally well so that a year later it is worth five million dollars and, as a result, I am able to double your salary to \$100,000 a year.

There are two very different ways you could look at this. First, you could say it is completely unfair since my wealth increased by 4 million dollars, while your salary only increased by \$50,000. But, on the other hand, you could notice, quite correctly, that we are both better off than we were before. And, presumably, so are a number of other people who are your co-workers.

Marc Roby: I see your point. The increased wealth of the company helped both the owner and the workers.

Dr. Spencer: And it must have helped a whole bunch of other people too, the consumers. The products or services the company provided must have been something that others found useful or they wouldn't have purchased them, and therefore, their lives were improved as well.

⁵ Data from Our World in Data, <https://ourworldindata.org/economic-growth>

⁶ Ben Shapiro, *How to Destroy America in Three Easy Steps*, Broadside Book, 2020, pg. xxvi

But, as I said, we'll talk about this more later, for now I want to look at the idea of socialism. Marx is the name most people think of if you mention socialism, but the idea is not original to him. It actually came out of the French revolution in the late 1700's.

Marc Roby: And, as many people know, the French revolution and the American revolution were linked. The French were certainly impressed by the success of the Americans in throwing off a repressive monarch.

Dr. Spencer: That's very true. Both revolutions were strongly influenced by enlightenment ideas, especially the ideas of natural rights and equality. Our Declaration of Independence, which was adopted on July 4, 1776, famously said, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."⁷ And the French revolution had *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, which was produced in 1789 by the National Assembly of France.⁸

Marc Roby: Which was, coincidentally, the year that our Bill of Rights was approved by Congress.

Dr. Spencer: That is an interesting historical coincidence. But getting back to socialism, Joshua Muravchik noted in his excellent book about socialism called *Heaven on Earth*, that it was in the dying days of the French revolution that a man named François-Noël Babeuf argued that there was a contradiction in the revolution's agenda.⁹ The last of the so-called "sacred rights of men and of citizens" in *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* stated that "The right to property being inviolable and sacred, no one ought to be deprived of it, except in cases of evident public necessity, legally ascertained, and on condition of a previous just indemnity."¹⁰

Marc Roby: That sounds reasonable, and in line with ideas held by the founders of our country as well. Property rights are sacred and government can't take away my property except for real necessities and it must then compensate me for the property taken.

Dr. Spencer: That idea is also biblical. The eighth commandment, which we read in Exodus 20:15, says that "You shall not steal." This obviously assumes that other people have private property which is theirs and we are not to take it. We could read verse after verse for hours where the Bible explicitly and implicitly affirms the right to private property.

Marc Roby: I know that people have sometimes claimed that Jesus' followers lived as communists. They will often cite Acts 2:44-45 where we read about the young church in

⁷ Declaration of Independence: A Transcript, available at <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>

⁸ E.g. see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Revolution

⁹ Joshua Muravchik, *Heaven on Earth, the Rise, Fall, and Afterlife of Socialism*, Encounter Books, 2019, pg. 4

¹⁰ *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, available at http://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/declaration_of_the_rights_of_man_1789.pdf

Jerusalem and are told that “All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.”

Dr. Spencer: I’ve seen that argument as well, and it is simply and obviously wrong. The verse itself says they were selling *their* possessions and goods and then *gave* to those in need. In other words, it assumes the possessions and goods were owned by the individuals who then made free decisions to sell them and then made free decisions to give to others in need.

Even the case of Ananias and Sapphira, which is sometimes brought up in this context, clearly validates the right to private property.

Marc Roby: We should probably briefly relate the story for those who may not remember it. In Acts Chapter 5 we are told that Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property and then brought most, but not all, of the money and gave it to the apostles. Peter rebuked them for lying about the amount they had received and God put them to death.

Dr. Spencer: This passage again clearly validates the right to private property as I said. We read in Acts 5:2-4 that “With his wife's full knowledge [Ananias] kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet. Then Peter said, ‘Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God.’”

It is important to notice that Peter rebuked him for lying, *not* for keeping part of the money. It is clear that Ananias and Sapphira were hypocrites who wanted people to think they were more generous than they were. In the rebuke Peter clearly states the right to private property. He asked two rhetorical questions, “Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal?”

Marc Roby: And the answers to both questions are obviously yes; the property was theirs and so was the money they received from the sale. And they were free to do with it as they pleased. So, as you noted, Peter does affirm the right to private property.

Dr. Spencer: The Bible frequently admonishes us to be generous, to care for the poor, for widows and for orphans, in other words, for anyone in real need. But there is a huge difference between my voluntarily giving some of my personal property to someone else and the notion that property is owned collectively.

Marc Roby: I would say the difference between those two views is an unbridgeable chasm.

Dr. Spencer: I would agree. But getting back to the contradiction that Babeuf noticed in the goals of the French revolution, as that revolution proceeded through its terrible course, the Constitution of 1793 added the guarantee of equality. Near the end it declared that “The constitution

guarantees to all Frenchmen equality, liberty, security, property”¹¹ and the list went on. I didn’t read the whole list because what is important for our purposes is that it listed both a guarantee of equality and property.

And, as Babeuf noted, property rights are in contradiction with the notion of equality, at least if that notion refers to equality of *outcomes*, rather than equality of opportunity. He said, correctly I think, that the equality of outcomes can only be achieved by the abolition of personal property rights.¹² In other words, the government has to control absolutely everything in order to then dole everything out equally to everyone.

Marc Roby: OK, I can see the logic there. But I really don’t like the idea at all, and that is not at all what is meant by the statement that all men are created equal in our Declaration of Independence.

Dr. Spencer: No, that isn’t what the founding fathers of our country meant. It is clear from the historical record that they intended that to refer to equal *opportunity*, not equal *outcomes*, which is why it says we are *created* equal. And it is also referring to our inherent dignity, honor and rights, not our abilities. It would be patently absurd to claim that all people are created with equal ability. In any event, Babeuf is absolutely correct that if you want to guarantee equal outcomes, the government must own everything. In other words, individual property rights must be abolished.

Marc Roby: And that’s not something most people will support.

Dr. Spencer: Not when it is put that bluntly, no. Although you can get people to support things that move very much in that direction as we will discuss later. Just to provide our listeners with a little food for thought to tease them, let me suggest that a progressive tax system, where people who make more money pay higher taxes, is a move in that direction. But let’s get back to socialism for now.

Marx and Engels were familiar with Babeuf. Muravchik wrote that “in their first collaborative work, *The Holy Family*, the young Marx and Engels paid this bow to the Equals:”¹³ and I must explain that “the Equals” refers to the Conspiracy of Equals of which Babeuf was a part. In any event, the “bow” that Muravchik mentions, is that Marx and Engels wrote the following, “The revolutionary movement which began in 1789 ... and which with Babeuf’s conspiracy was temporarily defeated, gave rise to the communist idea”¹⁴.

Marc Roby: So Marx and Engels viewed Babeuf as the beginning of the idea of communism.

¹¹ Available at <https://oll.libertyfund.org/pages/1793-french-republic-constitution-of-1793> and also noted on Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Constitution_of_1793

¹² Muravchik, op. cit.

¹³ Ibid, pg. 25

¹⁴ Ibid

Dr. Spencer: That seems clear. They also made a passing reference to him in the Communist Manifesto.¹⁵ There is a great deal more that could be said about the history of this pernicious idea. I highly recommend Muravchik's book *Heaven on Earth*, I think all Americans could benefit from reading it.

Marc Roby: I can second that recommendation. It does a great job of chronicling the failures of socialism.

Dr. Spencer: And that gets us back to what I said earlier. We have had over 150 years of history since Marx wrote *Das Kapital* and that history shows clearly that socialism is a failure. Not only was Marx wrong in his theory about the development of history – remember that he thought socialism and communism would be the inevitable result of a collapse of capitalism – but he was also wrong in thinking that socialism or communism would be good. There have been many attempts at implementing these ideas and they have all failed miserably.

Marc Roby: And many of them put a heavy emphasis on the misery! Muravchik wrote that “Regimes calling themselves socialist have murdered more than one hundred million people since 1917.”¹⁶ And with that, I think we have already gone overtime for today, so I'd like to remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. We'd love to hear from you.

¹⁵ *Great Books of the Western World*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1952, Vol. 50, pg. 432

¹⁶ Muravchik, op. cit., pg. 359