

Marc Roby: We are continuing our break from studying theology to look at some current topics of great importance from a Christian perspective. We discussed capitalism in our last session. Dr. Spencer, what would you like to cover today?

Dr. Spencer: I want to talk about our obligation as Christians to help those in need. The Bible is full of commands to help others. For example, in Isaiah Chapter One we read God's indictment of his people at that time. After saying that their offerings are meaningless, that he hates their festivals and will not listen to their prayers, we read in Isaiah 1:17 that God says, "learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow."¹ And, of course, at that time the fatherless and widows were among the most vulnerable people.

Marc Roby: We also have the famous passage in Matthew 25, where Jesus tells a parable about the day he will separate the righteous from the wicked. We read there in Verses 34-36 that Jesus will say to the righteous, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." And the righteous will then ask Jesus, "Lord, when did we do those things?" and he will respond, as we read in Verse 40, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

Dr. Spencer: That is a great passage for making the point that the Bible clearly teaches us to help those who are truly in need. And in our last session, we pointed that even though capitalism has proven to be a very successful system, there are still people who are honestly poor and in need of help. So, the question is *not*, "Should we help the poor?" We are commanded to help them. The right question is, "How can we best help the poor?" And the answer there is far more complicated and Christians can certainly differ in how they answer that question. But no matter how we answer it, we need to be mindful of biblical priorities. We dare not seek to do something God requires of us by ignoring other things he commands.

Marc Roby: What biblical priorities do we need to keep in mind when helping the poor?

Dr. Spencer: The sanctity of personal property to begin with. It is entirely appropriate for me to use *my* money to help the poor, it is completely wrong, even sinful, for me to reach into *your* pocket and use *your* money to help the poor.

Marc Roby: Well, I'm glad to hear that.

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Dr. Spencer: Well, God will hold you accountable if you are greedy and refuse to help others, but it is no business of mine, or of society collectively through the government, to try and force you to do so. I can explain your biblical responsibility to you and challenge you with the word of God, but if I take what is yours, I am guilty of the sin of stealing. It doesn't matter what I intend to do with your money, nor does it matter how much money you have. Nor does it matter whether I steal from you as an individual, or I gather together with a bunch of other people and steal from you. It is wrong no matter how it happens. It is a partial form of the idea of providing an equal division of all property.

In fact, it is interesting that James Madison mentioned this very topic in arguing in favor of a republic, as opposed to a pure democracy, in Federalist Number 10. He wrote, "A rage for paper money, for an abolition of debts, for an equal division of property, or for any other improper or wicked project, will be less apt to pervade the whole body of the Union than a particular member of it".²

Marc Roby: That is interesting. In addition to the equal division of property, Madison also listed the abolition of debts, which is another topic of great current interest. But I think I can see where this is headed.

Dr. Spencer: I'm sure you can. There is a lot of talk in our country today about raising taxes on the rich. But where is the justification for doing that? What right do I, or we as a society, have to their money? The answer is obvious. So long as they came by their money honestly society has no right to take it from them.

Marc Roby: But certainly, it is biblical for the government to collect taxes. When Jesus was asked about paying taxes, he himself said, in Matthew 22:21, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

Dr. Spencer: And Paul also commanded us Romans 13:7 to, "Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor." So, paying taxes is perfectly appropriate and biblical. And, I would add, it is biblical to say that people who make less than or barely equal to what is required for subsistence living shouldn't have to pay the same taxes. Leviticus 12:8, for example, allows a poor person to substitute two turtledoves or two pigeons, rather than a lamb, as an offering.

But we need to be careful. At some point, to have higher marginal tax rates for those who make more money is simply society stealing from the rich to give to the poor. Now perhaps some rational and moral argument can be made for slightly progressive taxes, but at some point, it clearly simply becomes theft. It is wrong. People with higher incomes already pay higher taxes even if the rates are the same, but do they receive more benefits from the government?

Marc Roby: I wouldn't think so. In fact, I would suspect that they receive fewer benefits in general.

² Great Books of the Western World, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1952, Vol. 43, pg. 53

Dr. Spencer: I think you're right. The main functions of government are to provide defense, infrastructure, fire protection, policing and so on.³ The rich don't use more of those services than others. And, in addition, there are practical reasons why progressive taxes are a bad idea, let me briefly cite two. First, it is often true that governments collect *less* tax revenue when tax rates are increased because corporations and individuals change their investment and spending behaviors or move away from a local high-tax area and also because higher tax rates are bad for the economy so there is less overall income.⁴ I have a couple of references in the podcast transcript for those listeners who are interested in details but it isn't important enough to go over here.

Marc Roby: Alright, what is the second practical reason you have in mind?

Dr. Spencer: That it is bad financial management for the government. California is a clear-cut example. More than half of California's state income tax revenue comes from the top 1% of our population in terms of income.⁵ And since the state also taxes investment gains, that revenue is even more volatile than normal income. For people who make that much, their income varies wildly with the stock market. As a result, California's budget varies wildly too. In the 2009 recession, for example, California had a deficit of \$39.5 billion. Now, most people's incomes don't vary like that, even during a recession, but since the bottom 60% of households in California only pay a total of about 2% of the state income tax, their stable incomes don't stabilize our budget.

Marc Roby: That's an interesting point. So extremely progressive taxes are of questionable morality and efficacy.

Dr. Spencer: Absolutely. I don't want to spend more time on this because we are interested in what the Word of God says about how Christians should live, including how they should vote. And Christians can disagree about many details of how our government is run. But, with regard to the currently in vogue idea of being able to fund all kinds of programs by taxing the rich, I think Christians need to be very thoughtful. If I steal \$1,000 from Jeff Bezos, it is still theft, independent of the fact that \$1,000 means next to nothing to him.

Marc Roby: That is a good point for us to think about. So, the first biblical principle we need to keep in mind while helping the poor is the sanctity of personal property. What other principles are important in this regard?

Dr. Spencer: The sanctity of labor. In 2 Thessalonians 3:10 we read that "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." There is nothing wrong with helping the poor, but we should be sure that we are helping them to help themselves. It may make you feel good when you give someone money, and there are occasions when that is appropriate. But we need to ask whether or not it is good for

³ E.g., Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible*, Zondervan, 2010, pg. 275

⁴ E.g., Thomas Sowell, *Basic Economics: A Common Sense Guide to the Economy*, 5th Ed., Basic Books, 2015, pp 426-432 and Grudem, op. cit., pp 286-289

⁵ Judy Lin, *The open secret about California taxes*, May 8, 2018, updated, Sept. 17, 2020, viewed on Oct. 8, 2020, available at: <https://calmatters.org/explainers/the-open-secret-about-california-taxes/>

the government to be in the business of income redistribution on a continual basis. We have to ask whether programs like welfare are good or bad for the people they are intended to help.

Marc Roby: Now I have certainly seen a number of very reasonable people argue that these programs have done significant harm.

Dr. Spencer: And so have I. In fact, if you go back to President Franklin Roosevelt, who started our Federal government's social programs, in his annual address to Congress in January of 1935, he said, "The lessons of history, confirmed by the evidence immediately before me, show conclusively that continued dependence upon relief induces a spiritual and moral disintegration fundamentally destructive to the national fiber. To dole out relief in this way is to administer a narcotic, a subtle destroyer of the human spirit. It is inimical to the dictates of sound policy. It is in violation of the traditions of America. Work must be found for able-bodied but destitute workers. The Federal Government must and shall quit this business of relief."⁶

Marc Roby: That's a great quote.

Dr. Spencer: And Candace Owens, who has first-hand experience growing up in the black community, said something similar in her book *Blackout*. She wrote, "Handouts absent hard work render men weak, and with depleted self-esteem; they stifle the entrepreneurial spirit, by removing our innate senses of drive and aspiration. Poverty and despair become the life of the man who is given a fish but never learns to cast his own line."⁷

Marc Roby: Yes, that is very true. But going back to FDR's comment, clearly the federal government did not quit the business of relief.

Dr. Spencer: No, sadly, it didn't. In fact, since President Johnson started his war on poverty in 1965 the United States has spent over \$22 trillion on anti-poverty programs, not including social security and Medicare. Adjusted for inflation, that is more than three times what we have spent on all of our wars since the Revolution.⁸ And you have to ask yourself, what have we accomplished with that huge expenditure?

Marc Roby: Unfortunately, not much, I fear.

Dr. Spencer: And your fears are right. Let me summarize some of the data from a 2018 study done by the Economic Policy Institute. This report was specifically intended to check on the progress since the launch of LBJ's Great Society programs in 1968.⁹ It concluded, among other things, that "African Americans are 2.5 times as likely to be in poverty as whites, and the median

⁶ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, *Annual Message to Congress*, January 4, 1935, available at: <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/annual-message-congress-3>

⁷ Candace Owens, *Blackout*, Threshold Editions, 2020, pg. 125

⁸ See Robert Rector and Rachel Sheffield, *The War on Poverty After 50 Years*, Backgrounder 2955, The Heritage Foundation, September 15, 2014 (available at: http://thf_media.s3.amazonaws.com/2014/pdf/BG2955.pdf)

⁹ Janelle Jones, John Schmitt, and Valerie Wilson, *50 years after the Kerner Commission*, Feb. 26, 2018, available at <https://www.epi.org/publication/50-years-after-the-kerner-commission/>

white family has almost 10 times as much wealth as the median black family.” It also found that “In 2017 the black unemployment rate was 7.5 percent, up from 6.7 percent in 1968, and is still roughly twice the white unemployment rate.”

Marc Roby: That’s disappointing to say the least.

Dr. Spencer: It is very disappointing. We have to remember that the definition of what it means to be “poor” is suspect, as we noted in Session 166, but the relative data are still meaningful and show that the war on poverty has not accomplished much good in spite of its monstrous cost. And, in fact, the government handouts have, on the whole, been very destructive.

What FDR said in his speech to Congress is very true. It is destructive of human nature to be given a handout over and over again. Putting people to work is good. Providing education and training to help them get better jobs is good. And providing a temporary handout in times of dire emergency is fine. But our system of welfare has been a destructive influence in this country because it violates the biblical principle of the sanctity of labor and it destroys families.

Marc Roby: Can you back that statement up?

Dr. Spencer: Very easily. Welfare is destructive because from the very beginning it provided incentives for young fathers to *not* stay with the mothers of their children and for young single women to have multiple children.¹⁰ These policies were destructive to poor families and disproportionately hurt blacks. For example, according to census data, in 1963, 72% of nonwhite families were married and together, but by 2017 only 27% of black households were married. For whites, 89% of families were married and together in 1963 and that dropped to 51% in 2017.¹¹ That is still a large and lamentable drop, but you see that the change in black families has been much worse.

Marc Roby: And it is well known that children growing up without a father have a much higher probability of living in poverty, going to jail and so on.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, in fact, President Obama, certainly no friend of conservative ideology, made that exact point in a speech he gave on Father’s Day in 2008. He said, “We know that more than half of all black children live in single-parent households, a number that has doubled — doubled — since we were children. We know the statistics — that children who grow up without a father are five times more likely to live in poverty and commit crime; nine times more likely to drop out of schools and 20 times more likely to end up in prison. They are more likely to have behavioral problems, or run away from home or become teenage parents themselves. And the foundations of our community are weaker because of it.”¹² And I would add that as of 2015, more than 70% of black children are born to unwed mothers and only 16 percent of black households are married couples with children.”¹³

¹⁰ Owens, op. cit., pg. 50

¹¹ Ibid, pg. 51

¹² Available at: <https://www.politico.com/story/2008/06/text-of-obamas-fatherhood-speech-011094>

¹³ Jason L. Riley, *Please Stop Helping Us*, Encounter Books, 2015, pg. 37

Marc Roby: It's interesting that Obama also admitted the problem has gotten worse since he was a child, which was *after* the Great Society programs started. The left, of course, tries to blame all of the current problems of blacks on institutional racism.

Dr. Spencer: But that explanation simply doesn't make sense. Candace Owens cites some of the statistics I gave earlier from the Economic Policy Institute, which showed that black Americans have not seen significant improvements since 1968 and have, in fact, done worse in some ways. She also cites their result that the share of African Americans in prison or jail almost tripled from 1968 to 2016 and is more than six times the white incarceration rate. She then noted, quite correctly, that "Certainly no sane person would make the argument that America has become a more racist country since the 1960s, which gives way to the obvious truth that these disparities have little to do with systemic oppressions."¹⁴

Marc Roby: Well, that certainly disagrees with the current narrative in our country.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it does. But as we have been showing now for several months, neo-Marxist ideologies are built on conflict. They require you to view everything as a power struggle and to put everyone either into an oppressor class or an oppressed class. And, of course, most people aren't going to go dig up all of the statistics necessary to find out that the picture portrayed by the mainstream media and the race industry in this country is, for the most part, a lie.

Ward Connerly, a black man and a former Regent of the University of California, recently wrote that "Individual racism will always exist; but in this country, the system is no longer racist."¹⁵

Marc Roby: Now that's a bold statement.

Dr. Spencer: It is, but he is far from alone among blacks in making that statement. No intelligent person is going to claim that racism doesn't exist. It most certainly does. It always has existed and probably always will. Let me also quote the black Democrat Orlando Patterson though. He is a professor at Harvard and wrote the following in a New York Times op-ed in 1991; "The sociological truths are that America, while still flawed in its race relations and its stubborn refusal to institute a rational, universal welfare system, is now the least racist white-majority society in the world; has a better record of legal protection of minorities than any other society, white or black; offers more opportunities to a greater number of black persons than any other society, including all those of Africa"¹⁶

Marc Roby: And he wrote that in 1991! I would think most people would say that things have gotten better since then. But he did also put in a plug for a "rational, universal welfare system".

Dr. Spencer: And he doesn't say anything in the article about what he meant by that, so I can't really address the comment. But he did go on to say that "superficial liberal stereotypes of blacks

¹⁴ Owens, op. cit., pg. 8

¹⁵ Ward Connerly, Systemic racism and today's California, Fox News.com, Oct. 6, 2020, available at: <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/systemic-racism-california-voters-racial-preferences-ward-connerly>

¹⁶ New York Times, Op-Ed, Oct. 20, 1991, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/10/20/opinion/op-ed-race-gender-and-liberal-fallacies.html>

as victims or bootstrap heroes are seen for what they are: a new form of racism”. I think that is a very important point that needs to be made loud and clear.

Candace Owens said something similar in her book. She wrote, “To be clear, the belief that white people are to assume all responsibility for black America’s shortcomings is a form of white power. One must believe in black inferiority to accept the thesis that black America is not responsible for any of its own shortcomings in a free society.”¹⁷

Marc Roby: That is a very interesting statement.

Dr. Spencer: And I think it is obviously true. The people on the left who claim to want to help blacks by lowering standards, establishing quotas, and giving them government handouts, are very condescending. They must not think that blacks are capable of doing these things for themselves. The great 19th-century orator, abolitionist and former slave, Frederick Douglass, gave a talk in 1865 to the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society in which he said, “Everybody has asked the question, ... ‘What shall we do with the negro?’ I have but one answer from the beginning. Do nothing with us! Your doing with us has already played the mischief with us. Do nothing with us! If the apples will not remain on the tree of their own strength, if they are worm-eaten at the core, if they are early ripe and disposed to fall, let them fall ... And if the negro cannot stand on his own legs, let him fall also. All I ask is, give him a chance to stand on his own legs!”¹⁸

Marc Roby: That is a powerful statement from a man who had himself been a slave.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it is. It was also quoted by Jason Riley in his book *Please Stop Helping Us*.¹⁹ I hope that our interested listeners will read Riley’s book and Owens’ book. They will both give you the perspective of a black person who took responsibility for his or her own life and succeeded admirably. There are many others as well of course, and they all put the lie to the idea that our society is systemically racist and that is it all but impossible for a black person to succeed. Look at Riley, look at Owens, look at Orlando Patterson and Ward Connerly, both of whom I have quoted. Also look at Thomas Sowell, Ben Carson, Larry Elder and many, many others, some famous, and some not famous.

And Douglass’ speech does not, of course, say that we shouldn’t make every reasonable effort to provide good schools and real opportunities for blacks and others who want to help themselves. We should. But handouts and lowered standards help no one and are unbiblical. There are clear biblical mandates to love our neighbor as ourselves, to give help to those who are truly in need, and to *not* give preferential treatment to anyone, not the rich, *or* the poor.

Marc Roby: Well, we are told in Leviticus 19:15, “Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.”

¹⁷ Owens, op. cit. pg. 132

¹⁸ See page 14 of the manuscript available at: <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mfd.22010/?sp=14>

¹⁹ Riley, op. cit., pp 4-5

Dr. Spencer: And that principle speaks against the idea of lowering standards or applying quotas to give one group an advantage even if your motive for doing so is to address some prior wrong. Children should not be punished by society for the sins of their fathers. I have never owned a slave, my father never owned a slave, even my grandfathers never owned a slave. Neither I nor my father or grandfathers ever participated in Jim Crow era discrimination against blacks. I strongly disapprove of racism. So to say that I should be discriminated against to make up for the past discrimination of others is unbiblical and wrong. And the individual person who would benefit, for example by being admitted to a university without meeting the normal admission standards, or getting a job to fill some quota, is not the one who was wronged either. And, in addition, the preferential treatment won't help him, it will usually harm him. As with everything else in life, Christians need to think these things through from a biblical perspective, not the distorted lens provided by our modern culture with its hateful, harmful, destructive neo-Marxist ideologies.

Marc Roby: *Very well, so where do we go from here in our discussion?*

Dr. Spencer: In our next session I want to finally address the Black Lives Matter organization as the most important current example of a neo-Marxist organization.

Marc Roby: *I really look forward to that discussion! So now, let me close by reminding our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. We will do our best to answer.*