



On the evils of the Welfare State

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God's mandate to help the poor is clearly given to the individual and the church. Nowhere does the Bible discuss the institution of human government as an agent of public charity. In fact, our Lord prohibits government welfare programs for mainly three reasons. First, the act of forcibly taking from one person, through taxation, for the purpose of giving to another is nothing more than legalized theft. Secondly, state welfare programs pervert the morality of charity in that stealing from one person to feed someone else does not qualify as an act of kindness. And thirdly, even in the least bit—and however well-intentioned—public charity inevitably leads to the expansion of government and eventually, tyranny.

Coerced benevolence is nowhere supported in the Scriptures. God's clear declaration of our fundamental "right to private property," the very basis of individual liberty, is found in the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not steal" and "Thou shalt not covet." Jesus acknowledged our God-given liberty when He honored the young rich man's decision to walk away in Mark 10:17–31. Likewise, the Good Samaritan was not forced or robbed to help the stranger, who had himself been robbed and beaten. Since Scripture never contradicts itself, you will search your days in vain trying to make a biblical case for forced charity.

Nevertheless, Liberals will argue that the early church was communistic. They base their case on Acts 4:32–5:11, the story of "the believers sharing their possessions." What they fail to point out is that this was not the government or socialism at work. The church's cooperation was clearly voluntary and motivated by true Christian love for the brethren. The element of coercion is completely—and conspicuously—absent. Furthermore, Liberals assert that Peter rebuked the couple for holding back part of the money from the sale of their own land, when in fact it was for lying that Peter scolded them.

In contrast to this story in the Book of Acts, the morality of socialism is envy, a hatred for the success of others. As Liberals in America today see it, there is an unjust inequality caused by those who are successful. The lazy and unproductive did not cause this inequality and therefore cannot be blamed. So those who are at fault for this inequality, the successful, must be forced to share their prosperity with those who have less. But the Bible tells us that not all individuals are equal in abilities or in outcomes. Recall Jesus' parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30): all three men had unique abilities and equal opportunities, but not all outcomes were the same.

Public charity not only entails direct theft, but the recipient of this said "charity" is guilty of receiving stolen goods. Ephesians 4:28 warns, "Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need." The verse also implies that it doesn't make much moral sense to "share something with those in need" if that "something" happens to be stolen property. Moreover, government social workers are implicated as well, since they are being paid through and aiding in the distribution of plunder.

A good deed can be virtuous only if it results from free choice and harms no one. Although the burden today is on the taxpayer, the welfare recipient is also being harmed. Government programs create a generational cycle of dependence. They morally impoverish the lazy and irresponsible. It seems that many welfare recipients tend to think of their payments as entitlements that the world owes them rather than the products of love and compassion. Because of this entitlement mindset, gratitude ultimately becomes pointless and obsolete. Benjamin Franklin had the foresight to propose: "I think the best way of doing good for the poor, is not making them easy in poverty, but leading or driving them out of it."

Franklin's words may appear harsh but consider 2 Thessalonians 3:6–14 which warns against idleness in a much harsher manner. For example, in verse six we are told to "keep away from every believer who is idle." The text then goes on to address how we are to avoid being a burden to others: "We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you." Furthermore, verse ten gives us this rule: "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat."

Public welfare destroys the virtues connected with charity. It denies the compassionate connection, the eye-to-eye contact between the giver and the recipient. The taxpayer is denied the spiritual blessings that normally come from giving. Helping a person in need and receiving a small portion of virtue in return is the essence of private charity. Progressive taxation and the redistribution of wealth have caused us to be nothing more

than spectators to the needs of others. Taxpayers who've already "given" think twice before giving again.

Historically, benevolent governments have all led to tyranny. Thomas Jefferson admonished, "The democracy will cease to exist when you take away from those who are willing to work and give to those who would not." In other words, the more one depends on government, the more one justifies its existence, and the larger it grows. Hence, the Bible warns the people against desiring a king: "He will take a tenth of your sheep. And you will be his servants" (1 Samuel 8:17). Notice how God references "a tenth" as the threshold of bondage, and yet the average freedom-loving American today pays upwards of one-half (or 40–60 percent) in taxes.

It seems that today we expect government to solve all our problems. Americans have become so dependent on the state that we have lost our sense of self-reliance. The family and church, once the cornerstones of our society, have been forced aside and replaced by a growing government. The more our leadership does for the people, the more we are willing to allow them to do. It is a cycle that creates an ever-increasing dependency. Everything from public education to unemployment benefits to Social Security—we now see government control in our lives as a normal and natural thing. So let us take heed to Johann von Goethe, who so wisely observed, "None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free."

Ray Harker is the founder and director of Liberty Lighthouse Ministries (www.godgov.org), a teaching ministry dedicated to God's cultural mandate and a Biblical worldview. The ministry provides live events such as presentations, seminars, and documentary film screenings to churches and political groups. Ray is a public speaker, an author, ideological activist, and expert on opposing worldviews.