

What Does the Bible Say About Marxism and Socialism?

Colossians 2:8-10

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Introduction

If you are over 40 years old, you probably remember the Cold War – a time of tension between the two superpowers of the world; the United States and the former Soviet Union. There were bomb shelter movies in school and numerous Hollywood movies depicting the horrors of nuclear war. It was an uneasy time.

So in 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell uniting East and West Germany symbolizing the end of the Cold War and the Soviet Union, people all over the world celebrated. The great Communist power had fallen along with its eastern European satellite countries. It was considered the beginning of the end if not the end of the Marxist experiment – democracy had prevailed and would be the future.

However, it was not the end. As one American author wrote, “*Yes, the Berlin Wall fell, but it fell in our direction.*”¹ Marxist-Socialist philosophy, culture, and terms had permeated the West and continued its advance.

Such an advance has accelerated in the past several years where we are seeing things never thought possible earlier in our lifetimes; governments control of society and individuals, enormous federal debt, incredible divisions between peoples, major cities on fire...

How did we get here? Well, it did not happen overnight. And it started long before 1991. Ideas, beliefs, and religions have consequences.

This evening in a rather short amount of time, we will consider Marxism and Socialism – what is it, how did it originate, and how do as Christians respond to it.

A Serious Warning

Before we begin, let’s ground ourselves in Colossians 2. Now in general, it is easy to be fooled about just everything in this world. People can waste their entire life pursuing a belief or philosophy which amounts to nothing – a vain pursuit not grounded in reality leaving them with nothing in the end. Even Christians can look back on life and realize they were seduced and sidetracked by something other than Christ. Paul warns us of this spiritual danger in 2:8-10.

8 See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits[a] of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

Here Paul was aiming at a dangerous belief system of that day which mixed elements of Jewish beliefs with elements of Greek Gnosticism. Kent Hughes writes, “*Greek Gnosticism taught that a person must work his or her way up a long series of lesser gods, called emanations, before reaching the ultimate god. Here, false Jewish teachers combined Hebrew rites and ascetic regulations with their philosophy, as a*

¹ Joel McDurmon, *God versus Socialism – A Biblical Critique of the New Social Gospel* (Powder Springs, GA, American Vision Press, 2009), p. 49

better way to move up the spiritual ladder. It was all very mysterious, complicated, astrological, and snooty. But worst of all it was very deadly because it mixed some of the truth of Hebrew religion with the delectably enticing mysteries of Eastern mysticism and Greek philosophy. This was presented as “something more” which would elevate the ignorant Colossian Christians from their crude baby-faith to the truly deep things of God. Evidently some succumbed.”²

Paul points out that such philosophies and others like it are deceptively empty and made to look credible through an ancient origin. They are also from the enemy – controlled by the elemental spirits or evil forces of this world. {The cults of our day, which may even name the name of Christ, come from the enemy} Such counterfeit philosophy will take you captive if you adopt them. These things will only prevent you from filling up with Christ and seeing Him as sufficient for all things.

Even though the names and content change, such captivating philosophies exist today. Let’s look at the elements of one such old yet evolving belief system in our world; its core tenets, its deception and danger, and what the Bible says about it. Marxist theory expressed through socialism and communism look at the world and man in a far different way than the Bible.

Socialism

Its Characteristics

All systems of government are shaped by how they answer two basic questions:

- 1) Who owns the property and controls money?
- 2) Who decides what is produced and how it is distributed?

Socialism heavily regulates or takes outright ownership of the means of production including land. These assets are far too important to be left to individuals who cannot be trusted or are unwilling to deliver the socialist vision for what is best for its people..i.e., the common good or what is socially just.

Socialism decides what is produced through a state controlled central planning agency. If it believes Widget A is best for its people then Widget A will be given the resources while Widget B will be given little or none.

Socialism chooses how the output is distributed and most importantly for whom and to whom it should be distributed. It does this based on some notion of what is fair and equitable or even worse rewards individuals or specified groups which advance the goals of the socialist state.

Its Stated Goals

Socialism states its economic and political goals as:

- Equality for all people
- People giving and receiving according to their need
- Less waste
- Overall fairness

² R. Kent Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon – The Supremacy of Christ* (Westchester, IL, Crossway Books, 1989), p. 68-69

Its Shortcomings

However, socialism ignores the basic laws of economics by:

- Decreases incentives for people to invest and work hard. This is because socialism requires *higher tax rates* on the more productive people to give to the less productive. The result is less innovation and improvements in the cost of living which every economy continually needs.
- Instituting price controls which lead to shortages – when a cap is put on the price of a product which is in demand, demand increases but supply decreases since producers cannot make profit or even lose money.
- Central planning of the overall economy down to the most minute detail – how can this be better than a multitude of individuals making timely buying and selling decisions based upon their own needs and desires?

Its Outcome

So what has been the outcome of socialism? Well, misery and suffering in the lives of its citizens. Shortages, hunger, and corruption mark these systems. Some point to the Scandinavian countries as socialist successes but there they still follow some free market activity and are able to provide deep social safety nets. Others like China, India, Argentina, and several Eastern European countries have seen the futility of a purely socialistic government and have begun to adopt free market practices which have led to improved economies. For some countries like in Eastern Europe this has been a hard transition since they were socialist for so long and old habits are hard to break.

Why So Attractive?

So why has socialism been adopted in so many countries and remain so attractive today, especially in the West? To answer this question we need to look at its parent philosophy - Marxism.

Marxism

The Writings of Karl Marx

Marxism is not a new philosophy and its tenets pre-date its namesake, Karl Marx. However, in defining it, let's look at what Marx believed and taught. Besides, his writings were the springboard from which totalitarian dictators such as Vladimir Lenin, Josef Stalin, and Mao Zedong launched their murderous regimes and which various political leaders operate today.

Marx was born in Germany in the early 1800's but spent much of his adult life in London, England on the generosity of his patron and collaborator Friedrich Engels. He was a staunch atheist and secular humanist.

His Diagnosis

Observing the problems faced in England at the time, Marx developed the theory that the underlying problem of the world was one of class struggle between the rich and the working poor. The poor were defined as the oppressed workers or the proletariat – the only ones who did the work but gained little from their labors. On their backs, the rich or the capitalists who owned everything, made vast fortunes despite adding little or no value to the process. Such injustice in the mind of Marx needed to be

eliminated. A society must be brought about – one where all people were equal in class with each person giving what they had to those according to their need (sound familiar from Acts 2?).

His Prediction

So acute was the gap between the “haves” and the “have nots” in the mind of Marx that he predicted a series of events in history. First, there would be a worldwide worker revolution to overthrow the capitalists. This would be followed by a period where the new ruling working class (the proletariat) would make the changes needed to bring about the final period of history where the world would enter an utopian state with no classes and therefore no more struggle – heaven on earth.

There were many problems with this theory not the least of which were the changes needed to be made by the working class. They included:

His Prescription

For the common good, land, the means of production, and money must be centrally controlled. The people needed to receive the same communication and education. The “rich” must pay a higher % of their income in taxes as to level the playing field and all people must work. Note the attack on the family – no inheritance rights, no parental control over what their children learned, two income families a must, forced migration from the rural areas to the cities which separates generations (like in China).

Marx said, “*Workers of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains.*”³ To achieve his aims, Marx called for the “forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions.” ...it is crystal clear in all these writings that institutions such as the economic system, the government, religion and family are inherently oppressive. They cannot be fixed. They must be destroyed. (Jeff Myers, Western Journal).

The Outcome

Well, what happened? Marx laid down his theory in numerous writings in the mid-1800’s. Those who adopted his theories, the Marxists, waited expectantly into the early 1900’s for the worker revolution. It never happened. The working classes never did revolt.

But ideas have real consequences. Disciples of Marx arose though who would force such a revolution. During and after World War I, a revolution occurred in Russia to overthrow the czarist government. Various factions battled for control with the Bolshevik party emerging to take control. Marxist ideology was instituted immediately by Lenin and later Stalin to catastrophic results. Since no one was willing to volunteer for this ideology, property was confiscated, millions were executed or imprisoned or died in the gulags, and individual liberties were strangled under propaganda and re-education. As American Walter Duranty, the Soviet Union apologist and NY Times Moscow correspondent said in 1933, “*to put it brutally – you cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs*”⁴.

³ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*,
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch04.htm>

⁴ New York Times, *New York Times Statement About 1932 Pulitzer Prize Awarded to Walter Duranty*,
<https://www.nytc.com/company/prizes-awards/new-york-times-statement-about-1932-pulitzer-prize-awarded-to-walter-duranty/>

A similar process was followed in China and other communist and socialist nations and continues today..

Cultural Marxism

In few short years, Marxist intellectuals in the West saw what was happening in Russia and quickly concluded it was the wrong approach. They observed the brute force and tyranny involved in forcing radical socialism upon the Russian nation; nearly all churches destroyed, punishing all hints of dissension and pushing the old culture to near destruction. They saw the process only creating dysfunctional and resentful citizen subjects.

A New Strategy for the West

Marxism then took an even darker turn. The movement's leaders adopted an alternate yet parallel path to achieving international Marxism.

A key person in this change of direction was Antonio Gramsci, an Italian journalist, philosopher, and co-founder of the Communist Party in Italy. Jeffrey Breshears wrote, "*Gramsci understood that a successful Marxist revolution depended upon infiltrating and subverting key cultural institutions and gradually changing the values of a society...he concluded Communism was too radical and too atheistic to be accepted voluntarily in the West. What was needed was a "quiet" revolution – one essentially geared toward reprogramming human nature...Gramsci argued that economic factors were only one aspect of social reality. Equally important was ideological indoctrination. A successful revolution required a persistent and prolonged propaganda campaign that would undermine people's confidence in traditional institutions, values, and religious beliefs, thereby making them more amenable to radical 'scientific socialism'.*"⁵

Rather than attacking the current cultures through the front door, it was deemed best to seductively overcome them through the back door...transform the culture rather than kill it. This was to be done by steadily infiltrating the major institutions which exert the most influence on a society. Takeover of the culture in general was in view.

Gramsci was one of the pioneers of what is now known as "Cultural Marxism" or "Neo-Marxism". The strategy was clear, "*First, undermine the very foundation of European civilization built on Western philosophy and Biblically influenced morality.*" Marxism would then install a secular culture that appealed to the working class so they would be increasingly viewed as the movement of class-consciousness, solidarity, and alienation from the mainstream capitalist society".⁶

Do you see this topic getting closer to our culture and our day?

Its Tactics and Outcome

Cultural Marxism then began its assault in the West over the last several generations in the areas of education, media, and all forms of entertainment; music, the arts, even sports. It has worked to redefine marriage, family, and parenting. The Sexual Revolution of the 1960's swooped in with relative ease and

⁵ Jeffrey D. Breshears, *American Crisis: Cultural Marxism and The Culture War - A Christian Response* (Centre Pointe Publishing, 2020), p. 93-94

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 95-96

has made a profound impact upon Western culture. For example, look how the media in our country has quietly and persistently changed the cultural attitudes towards homosexuality since the late 1990's.

This has paved the way for Classic Marxism to infiltrate Western governments through the education system and the mainstream media to quietly realize the many goals of Karl Marx; central control of property, money, and education, progressive taxation, guaranteed education. An aggressive push to advance the global warming theory has served to tax the people...

The vocabulary of the public square has changed as well – “living wage”, “health care is a right”, “free college tuition”, “tolerance”, “social justice”, and “critical race theory”. Political correctness is its guide with morality being relative, social consciousness, the equality of cultures, the West being blamed for most of the world's problems, and the five values that must not be violated; tolerance, egalitarianism, multiculturalism, inclusion, and all religions being equal.

And it has even infiltrated the church where in some corners it has confused the Scriptures with the pursuits of Marxist thought and if nothing else, has cast doubt upon the sufficiency of the Scriptures for all of life and godliness.

So today Western nations like the US, have adopted Marxist-Socialist thinking, while keeping a tenuous hold on a free market system and constitutional republic form of government. Norman Thomas, the Presbyterian pastor and regular presidential candidate for the US Socialist Party in the mid 1900's said this, *“The American people will never knowingly adopt socialism. But, under the name of 'liberalism,' they will adopt every fragment of the socialist program, until one day America will be a socialist nation, without knowing how it happened.”*⁷

So do not think it strange when you hear the statements of politicians, educators, media figures, and celebrities. They are simply drawing from the well of Cultural Marxism in which they have been taught and adopted.

And the emphasis on class struggle is evolving. It is no longer only rich vs poor but now race vs race, women vs men, and over so-called sexual orientation...true biblical justice has evolved into social justice or equality in outcomes.

Basic Tenets vs The Bible

So let's look at how the Bible responds to Marxist-Socialist tenets:

- Covetousness and Divisiveness; By emphasizing economic (rich vs poor) and now cultural classes or differences, socialism creates division and covetousness. “I want what the other guy possesses or think he possesses. We should all have the same things.” But the Bible says we are not to covet. Jesus tells us in Luke 12:15, *“And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”*. And Romans 13:9 tells us covetousness directly opposes our loving of neighbor. The gospel of Christ leads to unity and not division according to Ephesians 2:14-16.
- Theft; Socialism advocates the taking of property and lands for the so-called “common good”. It often takes hold of and misapplies Acts 2:45.... It also takes from those who produce more via

⁷ Liberty Tree, *Norman Thomas Quote*, <http://libertytree.ca/quotes/Norman.Thomas.Quote.FFB1>

excessive taxation to give to those who produce less or nothing at all. The Bible clearly states we are not to steal (Eph 4:28). Land and property ownership is assumed in the pages of the Bible. Old Testament laws are given concerning it, wisdom is offered for such ownership in the pages of Proverbs, it provides the backdrop for narratives and the parables of Jesus, and is explicitly authorized in texts like Acts 5 (5:4).

- Entitlements; while there are people truly in need of social safety nets in our world, socialist systems most often do not distinguish clearly between them and those who are capable of working. This promotes an entitlement mentality and an unwillingness to work. This again runs counter to the Bible where it teaches us to work so that we may be able to support ourselves and also share with others in need (2 Thess. 3:6-12, Ephesians 4:28)
- Removal of Personal Liberty; this is a foreign concept to the Scriptures where man is accountable to God and man as individuals. Each is accountable and stands or falls on his or her own. God has created all men to be stewards of this world (Genesis 1 and 9).
- Refutes God's Order in Creation;
 - Socialism demands elimination of the rich and the poor – there should be economic equality. However, Jesus says in Matt 26:11, *“the poor will always be with you...”* . The Bible always assumes the poor and the rich in God's order for this fallen Ecclesiastes world
 - It also asserts that the poor are naturally innocent and noble – their problems are simply external – they are victims of unjust world systems; economic, social, religious, etc. But again this contradicts the Bible which clearly states that man's problem is his sin nature and resulting rebellion against God (Jeremiah 17:9, Romans 3:12-20)
 - Socialism dictates that people exist to serve the State. But God says man exists to serve Him and Him alone.

Marxism-Socialism as Religion

But do you still see Marxism and Socialism as simply strange and irrational? Perhaps you are thinking, “those people are simply crazy? To stop there is to miss the point.

Marxism is a functional religion with a comprehensive belief system that contains:

- A Morality; defined by equality in people and for its expressions of tolerance and equal standing for all religions and cultures except of course, for Christians.
- Doctrine; Drawn from atheism and secular humanism which states that man is inherently good, man's problem is merely class struggle, the suppressing effect of the world's systems, and material need. This present world must be turned upside down and revolutionized. Incremental improvements in to the plight of man are unacceptable; health, safety, standard of living – these things simply postpone revolution and get in the way of realizing its utopian vision. Another key doctrine is the dictatorship of the working class
- Source of Authority; the materialistic world only – if you cannot see it, then it does not exist. God does not exist and any idea of Him must be suppressed along with those who follow Him. This life is all there is therefore the stakes are high for them to create this world in their own image. The working class has been delegated as the authority on earth

- A Priesthood; who are its leaders and its spokesmen. They are found in government, education, media, and celebrity. They are often called the intelligentsia - the advocates, the cheerleaders of this religion
- Making Sacrifices; In making sacrifices to its god; family, personal liberty, and if need be, people's lives – it is estimated that in the 20th century alone more than one billion people have been enslaved under Communism/Socialism regimes and millions have been murdered and this does not include the tens of millions of unborn children killed under state sanctioned abortion practices - people cannot stand in the way of this religion. As Communist leader Josef Stalin once said, *"The death of one man is a tragedy. The death of millions is a statistic."*⁸
- Creation-Fall-Redemption-Restoration Template;⁹
 - Mimics Christianity
 - Garden of Eden; the age of primitive communism
 - Original Sin / Fall; at creation of private property and the division of labor (industrial age), mankind fell from early state of innocence into slavery and oppression, exploitation, and class struggle
 - Redemption; when private ownership destroyed by working class revolution
 - Redeemer of Mankind; the working class through suffering will bring the kingdom of heaven to earth
 - Eschatology; Day of Judgment will occur when worldwide, the capitalist/rich will be damned. Original communism will be restored – no more class struggle – all by efforts of humans with consciousness raised. In this utopian vision, there is no idea of being in the presence of God, sin free but one where people are free of God and all peoples are equal. If only mankind can come together – remember this is an international movement

The dialogue, actions, and goals of those who adhere to this religion fit perfectly with the Marxist-Socialist religion – a religion diametrically opposed to the God of the Universe. Marxism and Socialism are far more than an economic and political theory.

Is This Anything New?

But should we be surprised at the formation of such a religion? The Bible warns us of these philosophies throughout its pages. Let us look at Genesis 11 for a moment:

*Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. 2 And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. 3 And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. 4 Then they said, "**Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.**" 5 And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. 6 And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down and there*

⁸ GoodReads, *Joseph Stalin Quotes*, https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/138332.Joseph_Stalin

⁹ Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live*, (Carol Stream, IL, Tyndale House Publishers Inc, 1999), p. 234

confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech.” 8 So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. 9 Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused[a] the language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth. Genesis 11:1-9

There is much to say here but see that sinful man has always tried to make a name for himself (v 4) – to seek an existence and reality without God. Sinful man has never cared for the plans and will of God and continually develops philosophies and belief systems to ignore God. Man has always rebelled and looked to usurp God. Marxism-Socialism is just another alternate belief system.

And Romans 1:

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith,[e] as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”[f] 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world,[g] in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Romans 1:16-23

Marxism and Socialist religion is just another attempt by man to suppress the truth about the one true Living God and establish an alternate reality.

Reflect and Respond

- We face Godless atheism in the West in the form of Marxism
 - Perhaps not dealing with people directly who espouse it but it is all around us
 - We must be ready to confront and expose it for what it is
 - Take this atheistic religion into account when evangelizing – engage with the truth of the Gospel
 - Are you ready to live in an environment unlike anything you have experienced to this point?
- Do not lose heart! God is sovereign even over the “isms” of this world. Be certain He is in control and is allowing Marxism and Socialism to advance for His purposes and for our good.
- Realize we are not wrestling against flesh and blood (Eph 6:12). Pastor Richard Wurmbrand, who spent fourteen years imprisoned and tortured in a Romanian Communist prison in the 1950’s and 60’s wrote, “It was in prison that we found the hope of salvation for the Communists. It was there that we developed a sense of responsibility toward them. It was in being tortured by them that we learned to love them.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Richard Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ* (1967), p 58

- Check your heart; have you adopted aspects of this belief system? Is government your practical savior? Do you believe man can get better on his own? Do you see the impact of Cultural Marxism upon our present day and possibly upon yourself? Repent and forsake it. Overcome it biblically
- Remember this system gains ground by speaking to the problems and sins of society for which Christians ignore, have no clear alternative to, or do not care about. Must be biblically informed and be ready to speak into else these “isms” fill the void
- There is one perfect government. It is a monarchy – a monarchy with a perfectly righteous king who rules his people in grace and truth. His Name is King Jesus. Is He your King? Our worship and affections reveal whom we treasure and trust...

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