

The Bible, America, and Political Systems

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At the end of this present age, God will bring to a glorious culmination this crazy narrative in which we are all embroiled. At its culmination, we will not live together in a democratic society. We will exist in the Kingdom of God. We will exist in free, uncoerced submission to the monarchical rule of God—ruled over by God himself, in the form of his Son, Jesus, our everlasting king. Arguably, then, democracy *per se* is not the ultimate and ideal form of human government. The kingly rule of Jesus is the ideal.

This ideal government will be realized at the culmination of human history. It is not, and never will be, realized during the span of this present age. So this is the question that concerns us: how should we be governed, or how should we govern ourselves, in the meantime? As we exist currently, we are not a people who freely submits to the rule of Jesus—far from it. So, currently, the ideal is well beyond our reach. What form of human government, then, is most to be desired, given the current reality of human rebellion against God?

It is my conviction that the Christian believer ought to bring all of his thought and all of his life into conformity with what the Bible teaches. Politics and political thinking are no exception. All too often Christians’ political beliefs mirror the naïve, foolish, and self-destructive beliefs of rebels against God and are not based on the biblical worldview. All too often Christians’ political beliefs are adopted on the basis of fashion, not on the basis of truth and wisdom.

I am not and never have been a political philosopher. There could very well be huge gaps and glaring omissions in my political analysis. But I am a student of the Bible; and I believe that I have acquired a reasonably competent grasp of the biblical worldview. It is on the basis of this knowledge of the Bible, and not on my knowledge of political theory, that I offer my remarks in this paper.

In this brief paper, I want to lay out fourteen (or, really, sixteen) biblical truths that I believe must be taken into account by the Christian believer who wants to construct a political theory and to engage in politics in a manner consistent with the biblical worldview. I will state each truth and follow it with a few brief remarks that focus on its relevance to political theory or our current social/political situation. I will conclude with some brief comments about American Constitutionalism in the light of these truths.

It is my contention that the foundational political principles upon which America is founded are compatible with all of the biblical truths discussed below. It is my further contention that all the other major political viewpoints (statism, socialism, Marxism, communism, communitarianism, or any anti-capitalist perspective) are significantly and fundamentally at odds with one or more of the fourteen (sixteen?) truths discussed below.

Truth #1: The ultimate and ideal form of human government involves the free, uncoerced submission of each individual human being to the monarchical rule of Jesus, the divine Son of God.

I alluded to this truth in my introductory remarks. This truth is evident in the background of Paul’s statement in Philippians 3:20–21,

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly await a *Soter* (Savior), the lord Jesus, the Christ. He will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of his glory by the exercise of the authority that he has to subject all things to himself.”

Paul explicitly announces that Jesus will ultimately be our *Soter* (usually translated “Savior”). Jesus’ role as *Soter* is typically—but wrongly—understood as a reference to his death on the cross as the basis for our forgiveness. But that is not what the word means. His “saving” us from sins is only a portion of what qualifies him as our *Soter*. By titling Jesus *Soter*, Paul does not intend to depict Jesus as the God-man hanging on the cross. When he describes Jesus as a “*Soter*” who will one day be revealed “from heaven,” he intends to suggest that Jesus is a conquering hero who has proven his qualifications to rule over us as our King by virtue of his ability to protect us and to promote our well-being. Jesus is the one who, at the end of time, will have defeated every enemy of human existence. Accordingly, Paul depicts him as a heroic champion riding into town in a march of triumph, announcing himself as the one worthy of our obedience and submission, presenting himself to us as our *Soter*. When that day comes, that will be the ideal political state for the human creature. Jesus will finally be ensconced as King; we—the citizens of that Kingdom—will finally have been transformed from foolish, evil, rebels into righteous, obedient creatures.

Truth #2: The state is not God and it cannot serve effectively as a god.

From the opening accounts of Genesis, a critical theme of the Scriptures is the rebellious desire of man to function as his own god—to not have to depend upon the transcendent Creator to be his god. Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the true God; all other usurpers are false gods. They do not have the power, authority, or ability to effectively control the nature of our existence. There is only one who can do that—the transcendent He Who Is.

As much as we would like to believe otherwise, no human being has the ability to effectively control the nature of his own existence. In other words, no human being has the wherewithal to be his own god. Neither does any human creation, any human institution, nor any other human being have the power or ability to be our god.

Nonetheless, human history is replete with people who want a god to care for them and just as replete with arrogant human beings self-deceived enough to think that they can be a god to others. This is implicit in what Jesus says to his disciples in Luke 22:25–27, when he responded to his disciples’ arguing about who of them was the greatest,

"...The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines? But I am among you as the one who serves."

Much could be said about this statement, but there is one important thing that is especially relevant to the topic of this paper: Jesus contrasts the way it is among the Gentiles to the way it will be among his disciples. The Gentiles represent human beings in a state of untutored godlessness. They are fools. They do not know the truth. They are out of touch with the way things really are. And how do they live? What do they value? Their kings pretend to have godlike authority and privilege, and they presume—in shameless *hubris*—to have the ability to function as God. They take upon themselves the title "Benefactor" as if they are the ones who give life, who supply sustenance, who grant prosperity, who create security, and who guarantee the well-being of all their subjects. But they are fools, Jesus implies. They know nothing. Only God, the author of all reality, has the power to be all these things to his creatures. It is the ultimate in exaggerated self-importance—indeed it is ridiculously silly—when a human ruler ascribes to himself the power, authority, and province of a god.

This point is particularly relevant to our current political climate. When we Americans choose leaders, we are not choosing people to be our gods, to be our "Benefactors." We are choosing fallen, sinful human beings to lead us. One of the most comical, but sad, events in recent political history was the national response to George Bush following Hurricane Katrina. For a significant portion of the American population, George Bush's failure to be a perfect Benefactor was a reprehensible act of betrayal. We elected him to be a god, and he failed. "Damn him" for being a mere mortal! The president of the United States ought to supply every need, protect every life, guarantee every comfort, and prove powerful enough to meet every challenge. If he can't do that, he shouldn't be president. We can see from Jesus' remark to his disciples that this is an utterly ridiculous and ignorant sentiment. It is to think like a Gentile, not like a disciple of Jesus. No ordinary human being is capable of being God.

Jesus explicitly warned his disciples to avoid just such a sentiment in Matthew 23:9,

"Do not call *anyone* on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven."

What does Jesus mean here? He means that we are to look to no human being to be the source and origin of life and all that sustains it. There is one and only one source for life and its provisions, the transcendent Creator himself. It is silly and evil to look to any human being to play that role.

Just as relevantly, in Matthew 23: 10, Jesus says,

“Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, *that is*, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant.”

Here Jesus is affirming Truth #1 described above. The only real, qualified “leader” over men is the divine Son of God who will eventually rule over us in the eternal Kingdom of God. No one else is worthy of the title. Any ordinary human governor who is worth the title will be a servant among servants, not a “leader.” This is what we should always look for in any of our political leaders. We should not seek men with an exaggerated sense of their own importance, who think they are qualified to LEAD and that they are deserving of innumerable privileges by virtue of their power, authority, and/or celebrity. Rather, a worthy governor is one who serves God and the things of God by seeking to govern in accordance with goodness, justice, truth, and righteousness. He is one who sees his role as being a SERVANT of the people, not a privileged, exceptional “leader” over the people. By this criterion, many of our contemporary political leaders are doubtless unworthy of their office.

Truth #3: Unequal conditions among human beings are NOT evil in and of themselves; God’s providential care for every one of his creatures is good and sufficient.

Beyond doubt, Jesus recommends that we place confidence in the providential care of God. He believes that God is good and caring when it comes to sustaining us as creatures. Jesus says,

“For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, *as to* what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, *as to* what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and *yet* your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a *single* hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 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 will we 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. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

The reason we become so horrified when God’s providential care does not sustain one of his creatures is because it is the exception, not the rule. As a rule, God is committed to sustaining the life and existence of each and every one of his creatures.

But one thing becomes abundantly clear when we absorb the full contours of the biblical message. God is telling vastly different stories in and through the lives of each and every distinct individual creature. God does not intend to make all things the same for everybody. He does not intend to bring about absolute equality among human beings. Our fellow human being and brother Jesus is the "firstborn of all creation." He will bear that title for all eternity. I am not the "firstborn of all creation." I never will be. Jesus and I are not equals in this sense; and we never shall be. For as long as this earth exists under the sun, the Jews are the special, chosen people of God. No Gentile people group can ever legitimately make that claim. All people groups are not equal in this sense. Jesus chose a select group of people to be his apostles. You and I are not, and never will be, apostles. All individuals are not equal in this sense. Clearly, equality of status is not and never has been a priority in God's purposes.

Likewise, equality of condition is not a priority with the Creator. Some live lives of toil and poverty. Others live lives of leisure and luxury. Some live lives in insecurity and fear; others live lives in relative security and peace. Some live long, some die young. Some acquire wealth, fame, power, influence, and "success"; others live in obscurity as powerless and "unsuccessful" individuals. It is the transcendent author of all reality that doles out the scripts of each person's life. The empirical fact is clear. The divine author is not committed to giving every individual the same kind of existence.

This fact is quite evident when Jesus responded to the rebuke of one of his disciples when he allowed a grateful woman to anoint him with expensive perfume, seeming to waste a valuable asset that could have been used to alleviate the needs of the poor. Jesus responded (in John 12:8),

"For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

What is most relevant to our discussion here is Jesus' explicit assertion that God, in his sovereign, providential care of mankind, will not eliminate human poverty. Here we have the Son of God himself—the one sent from heaven to serve as the very "light of the world"—expressing his authoritative assessment that "you will always have the poor with you." God simply does not intend—it is not a divine priority—to eliminate the reality of poverty from among men.

Given this fact, we have a choice. On the one hand, we can decide that we are morally superior to the creator. We can censure him for the evil inequalities in the world. And we can seek to supplant him, taking the authority of deity upon ourselves. Since God is not interested in doing it, we can make the world a better, more just, more righteous—that is, a more equal—world. Or, on the other hand, we can decide that—because God is a good, just, and compassionate being—the created inequalities in God's world must not and cannot be inherently evil. Accordingly, we would decide that it must NOT be a moral imperative to seek to create equality in the conditions of human beings, no matter how much our taken-for-granted cultural assumptions say that it is.

Clearly, it is the latter choice that the Bible instructs us to make. It is our whiny, human rebelliousness that carps and complains about ours and others' lot in life. A righteous response on the part of us creatures would be to submit to the will of the creator—for others as surely as for ourselves—and to accept the fact that it is the divine prerogative to script each individual life exactly as he wills it to be.

However, this fact needs to be qualified in two important ways:

(1) The source of some of the inequality in the world is human evil. Some inequality is caused by one evil human being (or one group of human beings) exploiting others to their harm. This is wrong, unjust, and evil. Such is not part of the created, divinely-acceptable inequality in the world. It is an abomination. To oppose and to strive against evil injustice is wholly appropriate. Indeed, as a disciple of Jesus, it would be part of what I am called to do.

(2) Submission to the will of God is not passivity in the face of one's condition. Passivity is not a righteous and noble response; it is an ignorant and evil response. As human beings, we were created to be problem-solvers. It is anti-intelligent not to seek to obtain food when you are hungry, or water when you are thirsty. Some adopt an attitude that says, "If I have no water, it is the will of Allah. I will not drink if God does not put the water glass to my mouth." This attitude is diabolically unrighteous. There is no nobility to such so-called "submission" to the will of God. Submission to the will of God comes *at the end* of our seeking to change our condition, not at the beginning. When we have tried to improve our lot in every way we can and God has nevertheless thwarted all of our efforts, then is where submission must begin. Submission is the righteous way to respond when all my reasonable efforts have failed to improve my condition. I can complain and whine—I can curse God and hate him—or I can acknowledge his right and authority to will that I live in an uncomfortable state.

Truth #3 is highly relevant to our political perspective. Most socialist political theories begin from the assumption that the inequity of wealth, privilege, and opportunity in the world is a grave evil. They assume that God is not doing a good job of taking care of mankind and, therefore, that mankind must take care of himself. Man must eliminate the scourge of inequality, for God is not doing it. Indeed, it is ubiquitous in modern political attitudes that justice and righteousness DEMAND the elimination of all inequality. And, since God is not doing it, the state must! This attitude is—from a biblical perspective—ignorant, shortsighted, foolish, evil, and insubordinate.

It takes a truly wise human being to avoid envy. Most fail. But avoid envy we must. I must not begrudge the rich man his wealth, the famous man his fame, the influential man his influence, the healthy man his health. God has given me a wonderful gift of life and existence. Whatever the nature and character of that life and existence, it is, in the long run, a good and wonderful creation. If I truly understand that, I will accept the life God has given me and will not wish for the life someone else has.

So much of modern politics is an appeal to envy roiling within foolish and ignorant human beings who have never come to accept the authority of God's will over their lives. This should not describe Christians who take the Bible seriously. We, of all people, must be immune to the appeals made to our envy. Envy must not exist among us. And just as importantly, neither should we deem it wise, good, or valid to accommodate or pander to the envy of others.

We must not underestimate how powerful a political force is the "guilt" that those who have various advantages of condition experience in the face of those who are correspondingly disadvantaged. The wealthy man is tempted to experience uncomfortable guilt when confronted by the poverty of the poor man. But, in the light of a biblical worldview, such "guilt" is a false guilt. The blessing of Abraham's wealth—or King David's wealth and fame—is not a source of moral culpability. Both Abraham and David are, in fact, culpable before God; but not because the sovereign author of reality has made them wealthy and powerful. It is God's prerogative to make some rich, and some poor. Our refusal to accept that God has the right to do this is one of the most important forces of evil in modern politics today.

The political solution tacitly accepted by many is to make deprivation universal. The ideal would be to redistribute wealth so that everyone is just a little poor and NO ONE has the advantages of significant wealth. The worst intentioned embrace this ideal out of an infantile impulse: "If I can't be wealthy, then I don't want anyone to be wealthy." The best intentioned embrace this ideal out of the perspective that all of us should be content with having less. This latter sentiment is certainly true—and most certainly biblical. But it misses the point. Human existence is not static, it is dynamic. Even if you were to reset the human condition, granting to each human being exactly the same economic resources, inequality would emerge again in no time. The ambitious, the "lucky," the hard-working, the creative, the frugal, etc.—they would begin to amass more resources than their neighbors. Should this be prevented? Should we refuse to allow such a condition to reemerge? Or, is God sovereignly in control of just such dynamics? Is it incumbent upon us, his creatures, to allow God to dynamically create just those unequal varieties of human existence that he wants to create?

Truth #3a: It is the moral obligation of every human being to love his neighbor.

This is such an incontrovertible biblical truth that I did not even think to include it in the first draft of this paper. I do not include it as a separate and distinct truth; for, by itself, it has no political implications. Love for neighbor is the moral obligation that each human individual has toward other human individuals. As I will discuss below, no government nor any other institution can love my neighbor for me.

I include this here as a subset of Truth #3 to forestall the faulty notion that God's providential responsibility to provide for his creatures precludes my needing to offer concrete, tangible aid to a fellow human being. Nothing could be further from the truth. Every human being has the moral responsibility to act toward his fellow human being as he would want his fellow human being to act toward him. When I am hungry, I would

want my neighbor to offer food. When I am in danger, I would want my fellow human being to come to my aid. When I am sick, I would want my neighbor to nurse me to health. All of these are our moral obligation one to another. None of the other truths of the biblical worldview in any way negate or cancel out this fundamental obligation to love our neighbor.

The fact that God does not intend to eliminate poverty does not mean that I have no moral obligation to come to the aid of the poor man. The fact that God does not intend to distribute his resources equitably does not mean that the person of means does not have a moral obligation to use his material resources to concretely love others. It always has been and always will be a hallmark of Jesus' followers that they seek to emulate him in giving of themselves and sacrificing themselves for the well-being of others. The truth and importance of this is incontrovertible.

But person-to-person love is an entirely different reality from governmental provision. It is very important to keep the distinction clear and not to confuse the two realities. The power and role we give to the state (to government) is an entirely different matter from the moral obligation each of us has as individuals.

Truth #3b: All human beings are equal in the most important respects .

Since Truth #3 asserts that life and experience is not equal for every human being, it is important to emphasize another biblical truth in this same context: in other very important respects, human beings ARE all equal. The American founding documents put it this way: "All men are created equal."

In Galatians, Paul writes, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:28) Here, of course, Paul is speaking with reference to God's eternal blessing. God will not show favoritism or partiality when it comes to granting the ultimate blessing. God will grant his eternal blessing to human individuals irrespective of their ethnic identity of social standing. (Rom. 2:11)

This is not directly what the founding fathers of America had in mind, but what they had in mind was surely grounded in exactly this perspective. If God shows no partiality in how he treats individual human beings, then neither does the state have the right to show partiality. The state must deal with each and every individual on exactly the same terms. It must not arbitrarily give power to some and strip power from others—at the whim of those in control. Every individual must have equal access to the state's protection of his individual freedoms. This is an important and valid social implication of the teaching of Paul in Galatians 3:28.

But there is an even more direct social implication of Paul's teaching there. It gets spelled out in various ways throughout the New Testament. Every human being, without distinction, is the rightful object of my love. In the command to love your neighbor (as explicated by Jesus in the parable of the Good Samaritan) it becomes clear that every

human being—simply by virtue of his being a human being—has a claim on my obligation to love him. All men are equal in this regard. All have an equal claim on my moral responsibility to love my neighbor. James 2:1–7 sees it as a grave evil when I fail to acknowledge that my obligation to love my neighbor extends to the socially powerless and poor just as surely as it does to the socially powerful and rich. All human beings are equal in the claim that their existence puts on mine: I owe it to them to love them. There is no human being that exists for whom it can be said, “I do not owe him love.” (Rom. 13: 8)

This is an important reminder in the context of Truth #3. While it is clearly not God’s intention to bring equality of material condition to every human being, this in no way obviates the need to love my neighbor by sharing my material resources. There is a difference between giving or sharing in order to effect “equality” and giving or sharing in order to concretely LOVE my neighbor. One can reject the goal of economic equality without rejecting the nobility, goodness, and moral obligation of manifesting love for others through concrete, material kindness.

Truth #4: Every ordinary human being is morally depraved.

That this is a biblical teaching can hardly be doubted. I need not prove it; nor will I fully develop this idea here. But, in the following three remarks, I do want to underline the importance of this biblical truth to politics and political theory:

(1) From a biblical perspective, the evil and injustice in the world ultimately results from innate evil in the fabric of every human being. This is in stark contrast to Marxist theory. In Marxist theory and sentiment, cultural structures and economic conditions are what create the nature of individual human beings. If a human being is evil and acts unjustly, it is because his economic condition and the surrounding cultural institutions made him evil. They are what induced him to act unjustly. How does one get a human being to be good and act justly? Transform his economic conditions. Create for him a different cultural environment. That transformed environment will make him a new man. It will transform who he is. It can cause him to become a good and just man. This view is in direct opposition to the biblical worldview. In the biblical worldview, unjust economic conditions do not make the man evil; rather, the evil in man creates unjust economic conditions. His cultural environment does not make a man evil; rather, the evil in man creates evil cultural practices.

Unfortunately, it is this fundamentally Marxist viewpoint that prevails in modern attitudes, not the biblical viewpoint. The taken-for-granted assumption within most modern political thinking is that the way to eliminate crime, poverty, and suffering is to change the cultural structures that make men criminals and paupers. Men are not criminals because, in their personal freedom and innate evil, they choose crime. Men are criminals because their life circumstances force them to be criminals. Men are never self-created paupers because, in their personal freedom and innate evil, they choose to be slothful, lazy, and irresponsible. Rather, men are made paupers by their life circumstances. Their social and economic conditions induce them to be lazy and

irresponsible. Accordingly, who can recreate man? Who can transform man from being evil to good? The government can! If the government will but transform the institutional structures of the culture, the culture will produce different kinds of people. The government, therefore, can produce good and just citizens rather than anti-social and unjust citizens. If we want to eliminate crime, poverty, and every social evil, we must change the social environment. And the only way we can change the social environment is to empower the government to dictate how we must live, how we must be, and how we must structure ourselves. This is an attitude that is fundamentally contradictory to the biblical attitude. Accordingly, it is a fundamentally false and tragically ignorant viewpoint.

(2) Every form of government, no matter what form it takes, must ultimately fail in the face of human depravity. Government in this present age is nothing but the rule of evil, depraved sinners over other evil, depraved sinners. Governmental decisions are ultimately made by foolish, ignorant, depraved minds, impassioned by evil and rebellious hearts. This is true whether the government is a democracy or a monarchy, whether an anarchy or a dictatorship. No form of human government can ultimately overcome the problem of human evil; for the government itself will always be a participant in the human evil that is the problem.

Every political theory that looks to the power and action of the state to solve every social ill (that is, every “statist” perspective) is ignorant and naïve with respect to exactly this point. Statist political philosophy assumes that “government” (whatever form it takes) will be a benevolent benefactor and will be there to defend its citizens and give them security. It largely ignores the reality that those in power are sinful human beings who are capable of great evil when handed the reins of government. How can I ultimately trust the state to solve social ills created by human evil when the state is itself constituted by individuals who are imbued with human evil?

This was the special insight of the founders of the American political experiment. The founding fathers, strongly influenced by the biblical worldview, as well as their own personal experience, were mistrusting of human government. It was axiomatic for them: any power given to the state was power given into the hands of evil men. In structuring the American Constitution, the strategy they adopted was clear: if the power of government can be divided up and distributed over several different evil people—with the specific power to block one another’s actions—then we can create the possibility, at least, that the interests, values, and concerns of one group of sinful men can keep in check and thwart the power-grabbing lusts of other evil men.

Today, we can see clearly how vulnerable the American Constitution is. It can be no match for the evil lust of evil men. When the Constitution stands in the way of evil men getting what they want, they will readily say, “Damn the Constitution.” If there is not enough regard for the established structures and principles of the Constitution to abide by them, then the Constitution will be powerless in the face of human evil.

Human evil will always find a way in this world. No government, no political structure, can stop or eliminate the effects of human evil. American constitutional government has survived as long as it has because of the momentum and excitement of a people committed to a novel and wonderful new idea. The American experiment, I would contend, is one of the more remarkable stories in the history of mankind. It is—or at least it is quickly becoming—a failed experiment. That comes as no surprise to a Christian who believes that man is fundamentally evil. But, for as long as it has lasted, the American Constitution was one of the most ingenious and one of the noblest experiments in human government that the world has ever known. No attempt at human government has ever been more in touch with reality than it has. In the end, only one political phenomenon in all of history will prove to have been more interesting than the American experiment—the experiment in pure holiness that God will institute among his own chosen people, the Jews.

(3) An interesting irony of modern American political attitudes is the split between the political right and the political left on this very issue. The political left is typically incensed at the greed and corruption it believes to be entrenched in the corporate culture of American business. More than anything, it wants to empower the state to confront and block the unjust, harmful practices of American business. This viewpoint's implicit trust in government is naive. Is government likely to be any less corrupt, any less unjust, any less evil? Will evil human beings who possess governmental power be any less inclined to use their power to exploit people to their own advantage than those who have corporate power? From a biblical perspective, it is fallacious to think so. On the other hand, the political right is fundamentally mistrusting of governmental power. They are right to do so, but the political right is perhaps too quick to trust the evil sinners who run corporations. From a biblical perspective, we can expect sin to ultimately find expression in both arenas. There is no reason to trust either.

Is one a lesser evil than the other, however? The left tends to suggest that you should invest an invincible power in government in order that it might be adequate to the task of protecting the consumer from the evil, greedy corporation. Is that really wise? Should we entrust the state with our safety and well-being? Should we make the state our God, our Rock, our protector? Why would we choose to place such faith in the almighty state? Is it because we cannot or will not trust God to protect us from something so powerful as the evil corporations? The political right tends to suggest that you need to trust in the power of the free market. Only the free market can and will protect us from the evil of greedy corporations. Only economic competition can keep the greed of businesses in check. The left's antidote, they argue, is worse than the disease. To empower government with invincible power is more dangerous than the power of any greedy corporation. The government owns the police force, the army, and the tanks. No human institution can withstand the might of the government. That is why its domain must be carefully circumscribed. Otherwise, government will become an amplifier of great human evil. To protect us from the danger of governmental power, the scope of governmental authority must be limited. And it must not be granted authority over the economy. Will that work? Will that keep evil in check? Should we entrust the free market with our safety and well-being? Should we make Adam Smith's invisible hand our God, our Rock, our protector?

Why would we choose to place our faith in the free market? Is it because we cannot or will not trust God to protect us from the evil corporations?

In my judgment, the better part of wisdom will see government corruption as an even greater threat than corporate corruption. But my point here is to promote the biblical worldview, not to take sides in this political debate. And, from the biblical perspective, the point is this: both government and business are threats, because evil human beings occupy the positions of power in both. Our only rock and protection is God, our creator. It is in him that we must trust. It is to him that we must look for protection. Anything other than that is idolatry. It is to choose to serve a foreign god, a god who is no god at all.

So, it is evil and naïve to place my trust in either the state or the free market. But it is my conviction that, while we must trust in God, we must wisely recognize the lesson of history. The greatest manifestations of evil in the history of the world have been promoted by the authority of the state, not by the authority of business interests. Both have accomplished great evil, certainly. But the greatest evils have always been perpetrated by the state. There is a reason that evil, greedy business interests seek the protection of the state. The state is more powerful than they are alone. Accordingly, the state can be more powerfully evil than the corporation by itself. So, as for me, I think the political right is closer to the truth on this particular issue. But not if they trust the free market as if it were an invincible god. One should not trust the free market rather than the creator.

Truth #5: Unchecked human evil is destructive to human existence in this present age. Hence, government is good to the extent that it blocks and prevents the full, unhindered expression of human evil. It is NOT the role of government to promote true godliness. Nor is it the role of government to ensure or guarantee well-being. The role of government is no more, and no less, than to promote order and civility, that is, to keep in check the expression of human evil.

To prove this conclusively is beyond the scope of what I can do in this brief paper. But, in my judgment, the perspective contained in the biblical worldview contains, at least implicitly, all three of these elements: (1) it is the role of government to promote order and civility, (2) it is not the role of government to promote true godliness, and (3) it is not the role of government to guarantee prosperity and well-being.

Paul states specifically in Romans 13:1–7 that governmental rulers are brought into power by God in order to reward “good behavior” and punish “evil behavior.” (See also 1 Timothy 2:1–7; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13–17; as well as the Noahic Covenant in Genesis 9:1–17.) Given Paul’s purpose in Romans 13, I would argue that Paul’s concept of “good” and “bad” behavior is limited. He does not mean any and all “good” behavior. Nor does he mean any and all “bad” behavior. Government is there to keep human evil from manifesting itself in a manner that has destructive consequences for human existence in this world. In other words, the “bad” he has in mind is roughly something like “anti-social” behavior—behavior that makes it impossible for human beings to live

together in relative safety and peace. Similarly, “good” behavior is the opposite, behavior that does make it possible for human beings to live together in relative safety and peace.

It is interesting, especially in this context, that Paul does not argue that government is brought into power by God to ensure our prosperity and well-being. If he did believe so, it is curious that he says nothing of it in this context. Romans 13 would be a most natural context within which to make such a point. The fact that he does not make his point here (in Romans 13) on the basis of just such a perspective suggests very strongly that he does not hold it. Government is not there to be my Benefactor; it is not there to be an earthly god; it is there to ensure the peace and order that will allow me to freely pursue my relationship to God in peace.

By the same token, it is not government’s role to promote true godliness and true faith. How could it be? Faith and godliness are inward realities within the human heart. They must be freely self-chosen if they are to be genuine. There can be no such thing as coerced faith and coerced godliness. Coerced faith is not really faith at all. Coerced godliness is not genuine godliness. Only the Spirit of God can produce true belief and true righteousness. It is idolatrous to think that the state could ever play the role of the Holy Spirit. This point, I fear, too often gets lost in the rhetoric of the religious right. We cannot, through politics and social action, turn the hearts of America back to God. Only God can circumcise hearts. It is not within the reach of any politician or political party to perform such a miracle. All that is left to us is to proclaim the truth and pray that God might work a miracle in American hearts.

Truth #6: Freedom in the context of social relationships (that is, political freedom) is unquestionably a desirable—indeed, a preferable—condition to live in.

This is such a well-ingrained cultural assumption that is difficult to even call it into question. But when one has successfully raised the question, it proves nonetheless true, from a biblical perspective: man was created to be free in his social relations.

Being in any sort of bondage to another human being is fundamentally contrary to one’s nature as a human being. Whether it is bondage to a master or bondage to a state, bondage is contrary to the very nature of what a human being is. Accordingly, to the extent that one has a choice, a human being will—and ought to—choose freedom over slavery.

Although his statement in Philemon 17–18 is not without ambiguity, when Paul tells Philemon to accept Onesimus “as you would me,” he is telling Philemon to grant to Onesimus the same respect and dignity that he would grant to Paul. The following exhortation is, I think, implicit in what Paul says: “Philemon, if it would be a violation of the dignity that you grant to me to make me your slave; then it is similarly a violation of the dignity that you should grant to Onesimus to keep him as your slave.” Accordingly, Paul seems to hold the following tacit assumptions: (1) every human being, including Onesimus, would gladly choose to be free; and (2) it is appropriate to the dignity of every human being to allow him to be free, especially when he has become a fellow-heir of the

Kingdom of God. These two tacit assumptions, so casually and off-handedly articulated by Paul, have very important and far-reaching political implications. All things else being equal, a state that grants social and political freedom to its citizens is more aligned with truth and reality than a state that does not. A state that promotes social and political freedom is more in line with the biblical worldview than one that does not.

Accordingly, any form of socialism that asks its citizens to forego freedom in exchange for the security that it promises is, I would argue, anti-biblical and fundamentally anti-human. Arguably, the bargain of the socialist state runs like this: "Give up your personal, individual freedom and become my slave and, in exchange, I promise to take care of you and meet your every basic need." Or, in other words, it is this: "If you will become my slave, I will be your god." When put that way, socialism is anti-biblical on two fronts: (1) It asks for an evil, idolatrous, and misplaced trust in the power of the state. (2) It asks for the evil self-degradation of my own being. It reduces my state to that of a mere slave, a beast, a possession of the state. It fails to grant to me the freedom and dignity that my humanity deserves.

Truth #7: Freedom in the context of social relationships (that is, political freedom) is NOT so important that one should focus one's life on attaining or preserving it.

In spite of its unquestionable desirability (Truth #6 above), political freedom is not the end all and be all of human existence. There are things that are vastly more important than whether I am free.

This truth is not addressed explicitly, in so many words, but it is implicit everywhere in the New Testament. For example, it is clearly implicit in what Peter writes in 1 Peter 2:18–25 when he says,

"Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this *finds* favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God."

Peter does not instruct slaves that, at all costs, they must secure their freedom. Rather, it is vastly more important that they conduct themselves as slaves in a manner that "finds favor with God." What would it profit a man if he gains his political freedom but forfeits his soul? My standing with my creator will always be infinitely more important than my standing in relation to any other human being.

This has important implications for our current situation. It is not the calling of the disciple of Jesus to resist the tyranny of socialism at any and all costs. Certainly, as I suggested above, it is more in line with truth to prefer to live in freedom; and, unless I am terribly mistaken, socialism must always be antithetical to freedom. But there are more important issues than whether America becomes a socialist society—namely, what is our

relationship to our creator. Having to live under socialism would constitute a light and momentary affliction. Not being right with God would result in harm that extends for all eternity.

Truth #8: The Bible assumes (and promotes) an existentialist concept of human freedom and responsibility—namely, that each individual has complete freedom to choose how he will define his existence and that each individual bears personal, individual responsibility for his choice in this regard.

To offer a thorough proof that this is the perspective of the Bible is beyond the scope of this brief paper. But it is not that difficult to see, I think, that the existentialist view of freedom and responsibility is fundamental to the biblical worldview.

Certainly it is clear in the case of the ultimate decision that a human being must make. No one can get saved for me. I must choose salvation myself, out of my own individual freedom. Every human individual is completely free to choose life and blessing or to choose death and destruction. No one can choose for him; and no one, but the individual himself, can assume responsibility for that choice. This much is indisputable.

But is the ultimate decision some sort of special case? Why has God made the ultimate decision of salvation an issue of existential commitment—an issue of individual free choice and individual responsibility? Is there something unique about the decision to accept divine salvation? Or is individual freedom and responsibility the way it is in every aspect of a person's life?

I am convinced that individual freedom and responsibility is operative with respect to salvation precisely because it is endemic to EVERY choice that a human being makes. All of my life belongs to me as an individual. Every choice I make amounts to me deciding and defining what will be the nature of my individual existence. "You are what you choose" is the slogan that is suspended over the whole of each human life. In other words, in the context of a biblical worldview, individual freedom and individual responsibility is endemic to what it means to be a human being, as God himself intended it.

Accordingly, anyone or anything that removes man's freedom to choose his way through life dehumanizes him—turning him into a beast, a slave, or a child. Anyone or anything that removes man's responsibility for his own existence robs him of his created dignity. This has very important political implications. Any political system that presumes to remove from the individual his responsibility to make his own way through life strips him of something that is essential to his humanity. Such a political system would be evil; one cannot conclude otherwise.

It is this truth—Truth #8—the forms the basis for Truth #6 above. Political freedom is a desirable state precisely because anything less than it is an evil. There is much evil in this world that we are forced to endure. Accordingly, we may not be obligated to eradicate the evil of social/political bondage (see Truth #7), but such an evil is nevertheless evil.

While it may not be the ultimate cause to which we believers should commit ourselves, nonetheless—to the extent that we have the opportunity to form, shape, and create our own political structures—it is only right and good that we should create political structures that preserve and defend individual freedom. As biblical Christians, we cannot disregard this important truth: man was CREATED to be free and to take personal responsibility for his own individual existence. Accordingly, our political structures should protect his individual freedom; they should not remove his freedom and place his existence in the hands of others. No biblical Christian can morally defend a political structure that reduces human beings to beasts, to children, or to slaves of another.

Returning to a statement of Jesus we quoted earlier, "...The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' But it is not this way with you..." (Luke 22:25–27), Jesus appears to have a very different vision of what human government would look like if it were not ignorant and evil "Gentiles" who were in control. Government would not presume to be the "Benefactor" of the governed—and therefore their slave master—it would rather be the servant of the governed.

Some would object that many people are incapable of caring for themselves. These individuals are desperately in need of a "Benefactor." Without a benefactor they will perish. For this reason, the best political structure will function as the requisite "Benefactor" and will protect people from their own foolish choices (as well as from life's exigencies that are beyond their control). Are not Jesus' followers supposed to be charitable, to love their neighbor? Doesn't such love or charity entail becoming my neighbor's benefactor when he is in need of help? And wouldn't the most powerful force for good be a government invested with the authority and wherewithal to be just such a benefactor to my neighbor in need—to be that benefactor on my behalf?

This is probably the most important question regarding the implications of biblical teaching for political theory. My answer to it hinges on an important distinction: there is a significant difference between love (charity) and tending to the needs of a person. One tends sheep and cattle. In the tending of them, he ensures that they get what they need. They get proper food, shelter, and attention to their biological needs. But the provider who tends his sheep or cattle—"benefactor" though he is—is not displaying love (charity); he is tending his beasts. Similarly, the master who feeds and clothes his slaves is not thereby loving them and evidencing charity toward them. Finally, the parent who provides for his children has not thereby loved them.

This distinction needs to be taken into account when we consider the functioning of government to provide for the needs of the governed. Does the government manifest "love" in relation to the governed? Or does it "tend" the governed like sheep? Many Christians assume that the responsibility I have to "love my neighbor" can be readily discharged if I simply give my consent to government to "love my neighbor" on my behalf. If government will but give a drink of water to the one who is thirsty, feed the one who is hungry, and care for the one who is sick, then I will not need to. Through my

authorizing it to act, I have loved my neighbor through the government's aid. But is that true? Has my neighbor been loved by this? Or has he merely been tended, like a beast? If he has been "loved," then why does the recipient of government welfare so seldom feel respected?

This is, of course, not a problem only for government aid. It is a problem for any institutionalized charity work. We have to take seriously the difference between reaching out in charity to truly love someone and merely seeing to it that his needs are tended to. The latter is almost always selfish. None of us like the psycho-emotional discomfort of knowing that others lack. One way to eliminate the discomfort of knowing that another lacks is to see to it that he no longer lacks. But there is a huge qualitative difference between eliminating my neighbor's lack (so that I no longer have to feel psycho-emotional discomfort) and genuinely loving my neighbor as I supply what he lacks. The goal of the first begins and ends at eliminating his lack; the goal of the latter does not end there. Love persists beyond meeting my neighbor's physical or material needs. Love is committed to knowing, respecting, and honoring my neighbor as well. If I love someone, I will do what I can to make him a free and responsible human being who can live independently of help. I will do what I can to teach him and to empower him to be able to live with the dignity for which God created him. Anything short of this is not "love."

Accordingly, even if my political views are mistaken, I am not mistaken about this: the Christian believer cannot discharge his moral responsibility to "love his neighbor" by authorizing a government (or any other institution) to tend to the economic needs of those who lack. Therefore, I am unpersuaded by any and all arguments to the following effect: because we are called to love our neighbor, we must support any and every effort to empower government to meet human need—that is, we must support every move in the direction of socialism. Even if socialism can ultimately be defended on other grounds, it certainly cannot be defended on the moral grounds that, as Christian disciples, we are morally obligated to love our neighbor. Why? Because the obligation is to LOVE my neighbor, not to tend him like I do my sheep. And true love, I would argue, can never be manifest in institutional care, including and especially in governmental care. Only an individual person can love another person. So no institution can discharge my responsibility to love my neighbor on my behalf. To pretend that it can is ultimately to forsake my obligation to love altogether. More likely than not, our desire to authorize government to meet the needs of others is to selfishly say to the government, "There are some needy people out there, would you please make their neediness go away so I don't have to feel bad about them?"

Truth #9: The well-being of one's soul is vastly more important than one's economic well-being. Accordingly, circumstances that encourage growth of the human soul are more important, and more valuable, than circumstances that encourage economic growth or economic security.

It would be hard to dispute this claim. Jesus said explicitly, "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but loses his soul?" He is giving explicit expression to just this truth. The eternal state of one's soul is vastly more important than any temporal good this

world has to offer. In Second Thessalonians, Paul writes, "...if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either." (2 Thess. 3:10) If Truth #9 is not the perspective of Paul—if Paul held economic well-being to be of equal or greater value than spiritual well-being—then it is difficult to understand Paul's exhortation. How could he propose to let a man starve? But Paul's exhortation only makes sense if he believed it more important to foster spiritual well-being than material well-being. It is morally reprehensible for a man, out of laziness, to presume on the love and good graces of others and to refuse to accept responsibility for his own physical well-being. For Paul, allowing someone to die spiritually of laziness and sloth is much worse than dying physically of starvation. If threat of the latter can lead to a turning away from one's depraved laziness, then that is a good and loving thing to do.

An important biblical theme is closely related to this: the value of suffering. Usually the Bible speaks of suffering in terms of its being a trial, a tribulation, or a test. The testing of a person's faith, it maintains, is exceedingly valuable. It is valuable because it is in and through hardship that a human being freely resolves the commitments of his heart. Those human beings who, in the end, will be rightly oriented to God and to truth will resolve to so orient themselves in and through suffering. The adverse pressures of life are necessary to make us face into and resolve the most important questions of our existence. Arguably, no human being will ever grow and progress spiritually apart from suffering. Therefore, to seek to avoid suffering altogether is to seek to avoid spiritual growth itself altogether. Clearly, that is NOT a good thing; it is detrimental—more detrimental than any physical harm ever could be.

This truth has very important political implications. What do we want from our government? Do we want our government to create absolute physical, material, and economic security? Do we want our government to be so powerful that we will never lack, never experience insecurity and fear, never have need of any of the basics? It sounds so good, so harmless. But it is actually diabolical in its maliciousness. It is diabolical for three reasons:

- (1) Only God himself could ever bring about such a state. If a government could actually guarantee this, it would be God. Accordingly, to look to the government to do this is to serve a false god.

- (2) It is not consistent with God's purposes to accomplish such a thing. God has different priorities. He is not committed to ensuring that I not suffer. God is committed to bringing about faith, righteousness, and obedient service to him. As God has structured human life, there is an important correlation between suffering and my being encouraged toward faith, righteousness, and a decision to serve God. The person whose every need is met, whose suffering has been eliminated, this person is far less likely to seek God than the one who is in need, the one who is in the midst of suffering. Accordingly, God is eager for human beings to suffer, if that suffering will promote true repentance. Forces that promote the false ideal of the total elimination of suffering are forces that are opposed to God and his purposes.

(3) Closely related to the second reason above, it is harmful to the human soul when one is so basically secure in life that he is not interested in confronting the question of how he stands in relation to his creator. It is the one who has gained the whole world who is most likely to forfeit his soul. That is why Jesus says, "...it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God." (Luke 18:25) The man who, in his own self-perception, is "rich" is a man who has no need of anything more valuable. The man who, in his own self-perception, has no significant lack is a person who is not looking for anything to meet his need. He is not looking for anything that he lacks. Such a person is being significantly harmed by his material abundance; his soul is in jeopardy.

The value of suffering, of course, does not make it right to PROMOTE suffering. It is inhumane and irrational to promote suffering. God alone has the prerogative to determine how and when someone needs to suffer. So it is silly and foolish to conclude from the benefit of suffering that we should actually do what we can to cause it—whether in others or ourselves. But, while it is not right and good to cause suffering, it does not follow that it is right and good to seek to eliminate it. To seek to eliminate all suffering is to stand in opposition to the very realities that God uses to promote our ultimate well-being. If by becoming economically secure one becomes spiritually dead, this is not a good thing. It is a disastrously harmful thing. This, at least, is the biblical perspective.

As I discussed above, it is very uncomfortable and unpleasant to be faced with the suffering of other human beings. Indeed, if it is not, then there is something significantly wrong with me. But, as a disciple of Jesus, my goal should not be to achieve a life that is pleasant and comfortable for me, it should be to learn to desire that God's agenda and purposes be advanced. But for God's purposes and agenda to advance, there will inevitably be suffering in the world—whether that makes me uncomfortable or not. God's providential governance of the world is not about me getting what I want; it is about his purposes being realized.

My political perspectives need to take all this into account. However good and loving it might seem, on the surface, to seek a political system that eliminates suffering, it is not ultimately so. The good and loving political system is the one that promotes spiritual well-being, not physical well-being. And the system that promotes spiritual well-being is not likely to be the one that eliminates suffering in the world.

This is the appropriate place to make the following point: One of the greatest fallacies in modern political discourse is the purely prejudicial, stereotypical charge that capitalists are motivated by greed. Are some capitalists motivated by greed? A biblical Christian can hardly expect otherwise. Are ALL capitalists fundamentally motivated by greed? That does not appear to bear up to the facts. Even if it is true that all capitalists are just as greedy as all other human beings, most capitalists' passion for capitalism as an economic-political system is not rooted in their love of money, it is rooted in their love of freedom. They are passionately committed to capitalism because they are passionately committed to extending individual freedom and responsibility to every individual person. Arguably, the vast majority of those who passionately defend the capitalistic system are not

wealthy, or particularly prosperous. The vast majority are people who, by American standards, are of very modest means. They do not defend capitalism as a way of defending their wealth and economic status. They don't have much wealth to defend. Rather, they defend capitalism as a way of defending the political freedom that they value.

Social-political freedom is a soulish or spiritual value more than it is a material value. Accordingly, it is a terribly ironic fact that socialists are more truly motivated by material greed than are most capitalists. Socialists want economic and material security at the cost of human freedom; capitalists want human freedom at the cost of economic and material security. It seems to me that the former are clearly more materialistic than the latter. So, if by "greed" one means being obsessed with one's material condition; it is the socialist, not the capitalist, who is "greedy."

Certainly, if one supports individual freedom, then one supports the right of a given individual to choose to pursue greed. Socialism will seek to block this possibility. Capitalism suggests that we must take the risk. If people are free, then some, contrary to what is in the best interests of their own soul, will choose to live lives of unbridled greed. From a biblical perspective, this is a risk that one is morally obligated to take. The appropriate antidote to greed, from a biblical perspective, is moral teaching. Society must persist in seeking to persuade the greedy person that he is a fool to be greedy. Rid him of his greed, not by removing his individual freedom, but by persuading him to freely act differently. The anti-capitalist would end greedy pursuits by socially and politically punishing greed and blocking it. He would coercively take from the greedy and give his ill-gotten gain to the needy. The capitalist, and the one who is interested in biblical teaching, maintains that this sacrifices the spiritual value of individual freedom for the merely economic value of preventing greedy accumulation. Coercive redistribution of material resources does nothing to advance moral goodness, for coerced charity is not charity at all. This can itself be stated as an important biblical truth in its own right.

Truth #10: Only voluntary charity is truly charity (love). Coerced charity is not really charity (love) at all. Indeed, coerced charity is not a moral good.

This too has important social-political implications. This provides another reason why the biblical perspective must reject the typical anti-capitalist political system. From a biblical perspective, it is far more important to promote true moral goodness than it is to promote economic and financial security. When the government coerces "giving" so as to create a more equitable distribution of wealth, it does not increase moral goodness, for coerced charity is not a morally good act.

The truth of Truth #10 is based on an even more fundamental truth:

Truth #11: The moral goodness of an act cannot be determined solely by the consequences or outcome of the act. An act with a good outcome can nonetheless be a morally evil act; and an act with a bad outcome can nonetheless be a morally good act.

Truth #11 is a foundationally important philosophical point upon which to base an ethical theory. It deserves much more discussion than I can give it here. I can only attempt to illustrate its truth in order to make it plausible:

The fact that the items I stole when I burglarized my neighbor's house provided greater benefit to the poor people I gave them to than they were of benefit to my wealthy neighbor does not thereby make my burglary a morally good act. In general, the fact that an act has good consequences does not, in and of itself, establish it as a morally good act. By the same token, the fact that an act has negative consequences does not, in and of itself, establish that act as morally wrong or evil. The fact that two men died, and not just one, when a man unsuccessfully tried to save another man from drowning does not mean that his attempt was morally wrong.

There are striking examples of this truth in biblical history.

First, there are striking examples of clearly evil and malicious deeds having very beneficial consequences. Joseph's brothers' selling Joseph into slavery (having decided against murdering him), was undoubtedly a heinously evil act. But the outcome, the salvation of the people of Israel from annihilation, was a very good outcome. Clearly, though, the beneficial character of its consequences does nothing to render Joseph's brothers' deed a morally good act. There is an even more striking example. Judas' deed of betrayal has arguably contributed to more good coming to more people than any other act in human history. Clearly, though, the beneficial character of its consequences (eternal salvation to everyone who believes in the significance of Jesus' death) does nothing to render Judas' deed a morally good act.

But it works the other way as well. The fact that an action has negative and harmful consequences does not thereby make the action morally wrong. We could find striking biblical examples of this as well. We are told that many of the people throughout history who have believed, proclaimed, and hoped in the promises of God have—because of their faith—been killed, imprisoned, or otherwise persecuted for their faith. Disregarding the fact that they ultimately receive an eternal reward, their act of faith would still nonetheless be morally right, in spite of its temporal consequences. The fact that it resulted in suffering and harm does not alter that fact.

While this is a woefully inadequate treatment of the subject, I hope the basic point is at least clear. Now if I am right about this, some of my previous points become even clearer. Just because good might result from the redistribution of material resources, that does not, in itself, mean that something morally good has occurred. It does not mean that such redistribution is a morally good or justifiable action. Coercive acts toward other human beings intended to bring about a good state of affairs are only morally good acts if the coercion itself was morally good. The fact that the consequence is good is irrelevant to the moral quality of the act itself. It is the moral quality of the act itself that the capitalist calls into question. How is the coercive redistribution of material resources a morally good act? How is it any different from stealing? One cannot merely appeal to its

seemingly good outcome as justification, for the moral goodness of an act is not solely defined by the goodness of its outcome.

Truth #12: According to the explicit and emphatic teaching of the Bible (e.g., the book of Revelation), the true colors of human government in this present age is opposition to God, to the people of God, and to the things of God. Accordingly, the ultimate destiny of all human government in this present age is destruction .

It follows from this truth that it is NOT in the nature and character of the state to promote and encourage godliness and righteousness. Therefore, it is an entirely futile enterprise to seek to establish a human government that will establish true righteousness. The "religious right" in America may be somewhat naïve and misguided in this regard.

However, the inherent godlessness of the state does not imply that it is immoral to support the state. This is the Paul's point in Romans 13 and Jesus' point in his instruction to give what is Caesar's to Caesar. One is not unholy nor disloyal to God if he pays taxes to and otherwise supports the godless governments that God, in his providence, has established over human societies.

Truth #13: The ultimate good is a human individual who, as an individual, is rightly related to God. The ultimate good is NOT the "common good" or the good of the "community."

The "common good" is a not very well-defined abstraction. It has, over history, led to great evils. One of the Marxist dictators said, "To make an omelet, you have to break a few eggs." This represents the basic logic that necessarily follows from any commitment to the "common good." Because, if it is the "common good"—the good of the "community"—that one is interested in, it is of little consequence what particular individuals might have to suffer and be harmed in the process of advancing the "common good."

There is absolutely nothing in the teaching of the Bible that would support any appeal to the "common good" or the "community." All such rhetoric is utterly alien to the biblical worldview. From beginning to end, the Bible appeals to individuals, as individuals, with regard to their own particular, individual well-being.

It is this feature of Jesus' teaching, for example, that so offended Bertrand Russell. Russell was convinced that Jesus was a horrible ethical teacher. He taught what Russell called an entirely "prudential ethic" that was completely devoid of altruism. What Russell rightly was sensing is that the center of Jesus' concern was the well-being of each and every individual. Jesus appealed to each and every human individual, as an individual, to be wise and prudent enough to choose to love God and the things of God rather than the things of this passing age.

Jesus was the prime example of someone giving up his life and existence in this present age for the sake of others. And the bible exhorts us to follow Jesus' example. We are

indeed to be "altruistic" in that sense. But there is never any suggestion that we should give up and sacrifice our eternal well-being for the sake of others. Jesus didn't. Rather, it was "for the joy set before him" that Jesus "endured the cross, despising the shame." (Heb. 12: 2) Indeed, from a biblical perspective, it wouldn't even be possible to sacrifice my eternal well-being to another's benefit. At most, one could only wish that it were possible. (See Rom 9:3) Furthermore, there is never any suggestion that we should achieve disinterest with respect to our eternal well-being and should never be motivated in any way by desire for an ultimate reward. It is expected at every turn that we will have regard for our eternal well-being, that an ultimate reward is what we seek.

A human individual who is rightly related to God and to the things of God—this is the primary focus of the Bible's concern. Why? Undoubtedly because it is viewed as the ultimate good for human existence. Whether one person or many persons achieve it, it is in the achieving of it that a good has occurred. And the good is in the right relationship between man (the creature) and God (the creator). This good could be achieved by a lonely individual in isolation, or by a whole community of people. But the good achieved by the community would not be in the community, it would be in the many individual relationships between a creature and his creator.

The Kingdom of God would be no less the Kingdom of God if only one person were granted entrance. Just one rebel against God being transformed into an obedient servant of God and being mercifully granted eternal Life is the great, unsurpassed good. As I will discuss below, righteous obedience to God necessarily promotes community. But community *per se* is not necessary in order to bring about the ultimate good that God purposes to bring about. Furthermore, the fulfillment of a man's greatest longings does not depend upon his participation in community. It may very well happen in the context of community—and indeed ultimately we know that it will—but community is not required in order to make that fulfillment possible.

Truth #14: True community results from individual commitments to God, not from individual commitments to community.

The Bible does speak of community, especially when it speaks of unity (being of one mind) and of having "fellowship." Indeed, it expects faith to result in community. The nature and character of the community that disciples of Jesus will create amongst themselves is expected to be a significant mark of the authenticity of their discipleship.

But it is important to note what it is that Jesus and his disciples expect will be the basis for that community. Christian disciples do not form community because they intentionally set out to form community. Rather, they form a community naturally and spontaneously if and when they each determine to embrace the same hope and serve the same Lord.

Romans 15 is quite explicit in this regard. Paul begins by asserting that the point of the Scriptures is to persuade us to embrace the "hope" that God has granted us. He follows by recording the content of his prayer for them, that they might all (both Jew and Gentile)

be granted to "be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus." Paul's point, it would seem, is that he wants both Jew and Gentile to be of the same mind in the sense that they have embraced the same hope that has been proclaimed to them. As a result, he desires that they might "with one voice glorify" God. Again, his desire is that they might "glorify" God due to the "hope" that all of them have been granted by God. Precisely because they do share a common hope, he proceeds to exhort them to "accept one another." (See Romans 15:4–13)

The import of what Paul is saying is this: the basis for unity between the Jewish believer and the Gentile believer—and indeed for every believer with every other believer—is the common hope that each individual shares. Insofar as a human being has embraced the promise of God, he is "one" with every other human being who has embraced that same promise.

One could describe this same thing differently. Every follower of Jesus has resolved to know, love, and serve his master. Accordingly, he is of exactly the same mindset as every other follower of Jesus. But what brings him into unity with other believers is not his decision to be in unity with other believers; it is his decision to be committed to the one and only Lord of the universe. Believers are united with one another because they have one and the same Lord; not because they have set out to be one with one another.

From a biblical perspective, the BASIS of unity is far more important than the FACT of unity. One could become united on the basis of something that is not worth committing to—even on the basis of something false or evil. But Christian believers are committed to truth—the truth about God, and the truth about his Son Jesus. Since God is the one and only God, and since Jesus is the one and only Son, a commitment to them causes every believer to be united in the same truth, and to be of one mind.

What, then, is the social effect of sharing a common hope and faith? When two people are each in right relationship to God, they will necessarily experience a bond between one another. They will understand one another. They will have simpatico with one another. They will respect one another's values. They will share in common the most important thing in each other's life. It is just such solidarity that forms the bond of love that unites them into a single community.

Furthermore, as individuals seeking to be rightly related to God, they will seek to emulate God. But to emulate God entails living one's life for others, not for oneself. This is yet a further reason that Christian believers will build community. For they will be committed to exactly that relationship to others that is conducive to community: they will be committed to love, serve, and submit to others.

But the fact that individuals rightly related to God will form a community is vastly different from making "community" the end all and be all of Christian discipleship. The disciple of Jesus does not form a community because he INTENDS to form a community; rather, he forms a community as the result of striving to know, love, and serve his creator.

The Christian is not committed to "community" as the highest good; the highest good for him is to have a right relationship to God, personally.

If community were the highest good for a disciple, then it would be rational for certain individual believers to be sacrificed for the sake of the community, for the whole. I do not mean that there would be individuals who would sacrifice themselves for others; rather, I mean that the community would sacrifice certain individuals for the sake of itself, the community. But such a notion is entirely foreign to the teaching of the Bible. Nowhere is one encouraged to accept that he might have to be sacrificed so that the "community" might prosper. There are numerous instances where the disciple is encouraged to sacrifice himself for other individuals—Jesus is held out as the supreme example of this. But never is the disciple encouraged to sacrifice himself for the whole, for the "common good," for the community.

Indeed, to actively or passively sacrifice another human individual for the sake of the community—a sentiment that is typical and commonplace in the rhetoric of statism and socialism—is in direct contradiction to biblical values. The biblical virtue is love. I am called upon to love my neighbor as myself. The disciple of Jesus is instructed to live his life for the "neighbor"—for the other individual. How can I, without contradiction, love my neighbor as myself and at the same time choose to have him sacrificed for the sake of the whole? Jesus' exhortation is for me to live as "a man for other individuals," not as "a man for the community." Jesus never instructs us to love the abstract reality of a community; he instructs us to love concrete individuals. To suggest otherwise is to impose on my reading of the Bible a worldview that is entirely alien to the Bible itself.

It is quite instructive that Jesus compares the heart of God to a man who leaves 99 of his flock of 100 sheep in the mountains while he seeks the one isolated, individual sheep that is lost. Jesus sums up that parable, "So it is not *the* will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish." (Matthew 18:14) The will of God, Jesus clearly states, concerns human individuals as individuals. If the will of God were different, if it were for the overall safety of the flock itself, then Jesus would have to have told a different parable. He would have said something like this: "So it is not *the* will of your Father who is in heaven that the waywardness of one of these little ones should put into jeopardy the flock as a whole." But this is clearly in conflict with what Jesus actually taught.

When our final hope is realized and we enter into the final Kingdom of God, what will the nature of that Kingdom be? Will it involve a community that exists in and for itself? Will the Kingdom of God be an abstract reality within which we are merely replaceable parts? Or, will it be a community of individuals who—each being valuable in his own right—are rightly related to God? Surely we are to understand the Kingdom of God as the latter.

Why then would we think that our calling as disciples of Jesus is to establish an impressive community? It makes no difference whether we see the community as a society-wide community created with unbelievers, or as a counter-cultural community

that is created in and among believers. Either way, intentionally creating community is not the sum and substance of what a disciple of Jesus is supposed to do. The focus of Christian discipleship is to be a faithful and diligent follower of Jesus, as an individual.

Replacing individual commitment to God and truth with a focus on Christian community is not an innocent, misplaced emphasis. It is a diabolical mistake with many harmful effects. If the community is all-important—along with its harmony and unity—then there is no room for the individual to struggle to discover what is true and to embrace it from a free conscience. The truth has already been decided. One's responsibility as a disciple is to conform to the community's understanding. Solidarity with the community is what he is called to. Silence your questions; stop your restless seeking; entrust your soul to the wisdom of the community. The Christian disciple must be absorbed into the community in order to demonstrate his faith. This is diabolically false. A faith that is simply a reflexive response to the community is no true faith at all. True faith is a faith that is freely chosen, chosen as an individual response to an individual call. To attempt to steal from an individual the opportunity and responsibility to choose as an individual is to attempt to rob him of the opportunity to embrace salvation itself.

Concluding Remarks:

All of the fourteen truths listed above are truths that, I believe, are taught in and promoted by the Bible. None of the major political theories is compatible with all fourteen of these truths. None, that is, with the possible exception of something roughly like American Constitutionalism. It is quite astonishing how remarkably compatible the founding principles of the United States of America are with the basic worldview of the Bible. Particularly noteworthy is the degree to which the worldview of the founders seems to incorporate a biblical worldview—and the degree to which the structures defined by the United States Constitution seem to be informed by the biblical view—of human sin and evil. It seems to me that no other major political theory accommodates the reality of human sin so realistically as does the United States Constitution. I will not attempt to demonstrate that here. I leave it to the reader to ponder.

When I contemplate the nearly miraculous consensus that was reached at the Constitutional convention, allowing the United States Constitution to become a living reality, it is not chauvinism, I think, but sober reflection that leads me to conclude that America was purposed by God to be a unique experiment in human history. The government established by the American Constitution, with all of its flaws, was perhaps as good a form of government as could possibly be formed to structure a society where sinners could live together in safety and order with a semblance of justice. But, as I think we can clearly see today, the American experiment is doomed to fail. Indeed, perhaps it already has failed. If the American Constitution is no match for the nature and extent of human evil, if the Constitution of the United States cannot survive the "deceitfulness of sin" in the human heart, then no political system can. Yet we can see very clearly today how vulnerable the United States political system is to greed, corruption, ignorance, immorality, and perversion. Human evil will, and ultimately must, win. It is only a matter of time.

The only other striking political experiment that God will do in human history (indeed the only one the Bible explicitly talks about) is the Covenant that God made with Israel. That too has already proved no match for human evil. Because the hearts of the ancient Jews were uncircumcised, the old Covenant did not produce righteous obedience to Israel's God. But that experiment is not altogether over just yet. God will one day circumcise the hearts of his people. When that day comes, we will see another important phase of that experiment. A government where the inward orientation of the governed is to seek and serve God. That will be a vastly more successful experiment than the American experiment. For, while the American experiment was an experiment in how UNSANCTIFIED sinners might live together well, the New Covenant experiment will be an experiment in how a holy, SANCTIFIED people might live together well.

While the American system will ultimately prove inferior to the New Covenant, it has shown itself superior to the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant required purity and holiness of unsanctified Jews. The uncircumcised hearts of the governed doomed it to failure. The American experiment did not require purity and holiness of unsanctified Gentiles. It required only a sort of self-restrained civility and decency. In the end, even that much will prove too demanding for unsanctified Gentiles, but it was more successful than the Old Covenant was.

When all is said and done, I find the impending death of the American governmental system a truly grievous thing. Short of the rule of God over his own sanctified people Israel, no more noble and righteous attempt at human government has ever been seen in all of human history. Its disappearance is no slight loss. I believe it is cause for great mourning.