

## **Topic 3:**

### **The Role of Private Property in a Just Society**

Property may be the most controversial topic of all. People do not understand it, many think of it as the source of evil and exploitation and it gives rise to jealousies, conflict, theft and frequently war.

It is absolutely essential we understand God's view of property ownership and use.

Karl Marx, founder of Communism viewed the elimination of private property as essential to his twin and significantly inter related projects of helping society evolve past capitalism (a term he invented) and Christianity. The very term Communism comes from the idea of owning property in common.

#### **I. Q: What is property?**

- a. All is God's and we are stewards but we are to manage our property for our benefit and profit and for His glory.
- b. Oikonomia – Greek word found in the NT 50 plus times means steward and also means economy
- c. More than land
  - i. Sweat of our brow – our labor **Gen 3:19, Lev 19:13, Deut 24:15**
  - ii. Fruits of our labor – in many cases the results of our labor unless we sell that to an employer **Ps 128:2, Pr 14:23, Deut 30:8-10, Gen 29-30**
  - iii. Ideas – God hold's us responsible for our thoughts **Ez 11:5, Ps 139:2, Is 66:18**
  - iv. Skills – **Gen 4:20 – 26, Ex 36:1-2**
  - v. All kinds of goods – Exodus 22 gives a partial list of stuff someone could steal
  - vi. Land

#### **II. God's position on property**

- a. It is privately owned – **Ex 20:8**
  - i. The idea of stealing implies it is owned
  - ii. Many verses through out the Bible about private property
    1. Promised Land **Gen 12 and 15**
    2. All sort of verses through out the Bible
    3. Maybe one of the most interesting is in the NT **Acts 5:1-4**
      - a. Peter clearly states the land was theirs to do with as they saw fit

- b. He then states the money from the sale was theirs to do with as they saw fit
- 4. Many use Acts 4 as supposed support for the idea that the NT era is different on property
  - a. **Acts 4:32-36**
  - b. Surely this means that in the NT era common property is the way
  - c. But if that were the case Peter would have not told Ananias his property was his to do with as he wanted in the next chapter
  - d. No where do we see this being prescribed for any other church
    - i. They are commanded to be charitable
    - ii. Paul encourages proper management and preparation
    - iii. No church was told to have common property
    - iv. Nowhere is this even hinted at as a way to organize larger society

### **III. Q: Why is private property so important?**

- a. All land in the Promise Land was allocated to families – not an inch of it was held in common or un-owned
- b. History and research gives us clear answers
- c. Economic Reasons
  - i. The land and by that we mean the nation of Israel was to be prosperous (flow with milk and honey)
  - ii. All of history tells us that private property is far more productive than common property
    - 1. People do not take care of common property
      - a. Who will invest time and money to care for common property?
      - b. Sides of the road v. private yards
      - c. Cows v. bison
      - d. Over fishing
    - 2. Common property does not get developed
      - a. Who builds or plants on common property?
      - b. Who puts in the hard work to develop skills and/or get an education if you can't earn an income from those skills?
    - 3. Common property cannot be used
      - a. Sold
      - b. Rented
      - c. Traded

- d. Hired
  - e. Developed
  - f. Borrowed against
  - g. Can't donate it to church or charity
  - h. It is locked into place and of little value
4. If a society wants prosperity and by that I mean practicing good stewardship and serving others it must have private property
  5. The idea of the land flowing with prosperity is of course a brilliant analogy
    - a. We need to think of resources as flowing to their best use as determined by who is willing to pay for them
    - b. They can only flow if there is the ability to transfer ownership and use them
    - c. If they are unowned they can not be transferred and cannot create prosperity
  6. This is good stewardship
  - 7. Matthew 25:14-28**

d. Moral Reasons

- i. The point that many miss is that private property also has huge moral implications
- ii. It leads to better social outcomes
  1. Less drug use
  2. Lower teen pregnancy
  3. Lower crime rates
  4. Better work ethic
  5. More charity
- iii. The Pilgrim experience demonstrates this
  1. The Plymouth Plantation was ordered to hold all property in common and to work the land in common
  2. It led to
    - a. Starvation
    - b. Death of about half the colony
    - c. Neglect by many of tasks and chores
    - d. An ignoring of religious duties
  3. Bradford then assigned each family a parcel of land and made them responsible for its production
    - a. Led to
      - i. An abundance
      - ii. Thanksgiving
  4. Read about in William Bradford's *On Plimouth Plantation*

- a. "At length, after much debate of things, the Governor (with the advice of the chiefest amongst them) gave way that they should set corn every man for his own particular, and in that regard trust to themselves; in all other things to go on in the general way as before. And so assigned to every family a parcel of land, according to the proportion of their number, for that end, only for present use (but made no division for inheritance) and ranged all boys and youth under some family. This had very good success, for it made all hands very industrious, so as much more corn was planted than otherwise would have been by any means the Governor or any other could use, and saved him a great deal of trouble, and gave far better content. The women now went willingly into the field, and took their little ones with them to set corn; which before would allege weakness and inability; whom to have compelled would have been thought great tyranny and oppression.
- b. The experience that was had in this common course and condition, tried sundry years and that amongst godly and sober men, may well evince the vanity of that conceit of Plato's and other ancients applauded by some of later times; that the taking away of property and bringing in community into a commonwealth would make them happy and flourishing; as if they were wiser than God. For this community (so far as it was) was found to breed much confusion and discontent and retard much employment that would have been to their benefit and comfort. For the young men, that were most able and fit for labour and service, did repine that they should spend their time and strength to work for other men's wives and children without any recompense. The strong, or man of parts, had no more in division of victuals and clothes than he that was weak and not able to do a quarter the other could; this was thought injustice. The aged and graver men to be ranked and equalized in labours and victuals, clothes, etc., with the meaner and younger sort, thought it some indignity and disrespect unto them. And for men's wives to be commanded to do service for other men, as dressing their meat, washing their clothes, etc., they deemed it a kind of slavery, neither could many husbands well

brook it. Upon the point all being to have alike, and all to do alike, they thought themselves in the like condition, and one as good as another; and so, if it did not cut off those relations that God hath set amongst men, yet it did at least much diminish and take off the mutual respects that should be preserved amongst them. And would have been worse if they had been men of another condition. Let none object this is men's corruption, and nothing to the course itself. I answer, seeing all men have this corruption in them, God in His wisdom saw another course fitter for them." - Bradford, Chapter 16

iv. **Read Genesis 23**

**1. Q: Abraham insisted on paying for this field – why when it was offered as a gift?**

- a. God's Promised Land
- b. He would own it clear of any potential claims
- c. We see the mechanics of property transfer already in place – contracts and deeds

IV. Charity

a. Many see Government relief programs as an extension of Christian charity – a modern and proper application of the commands to help the poor

**b. But this is not so for several reasons – Q: What does proper Biblical charity look like?**

i. **Lev. 19:1-11**

1. Charity comes from the production of private property
2. It is not charity if it is not owned

ii. **Mt. 6:1-4**

1. Privately done – it is for the recipient not the donor
2. Also maintains the dignity of the recipient
  - a. Does not create a greater-lessor relationship

iii. **Luke 10:25-37**

1. Based on knowledge – the Samaritan went and found out what the man needed – driven by compassion
2. Sacrificial – he invested his own
  - a. Time – he stopped and went out of his way maybe by a whole day
  - b. Money – paid two pence (2 days' wage, enough to feed 2 dozen people)
  - c. Resources – oil and wine
  - d. Relationship – he seems to know the inn keeper
  - e. Reputation – made himself liable for the man's future expenses

3. Temporary – the man was expected to get better and get back to life
4. Q: **What or who is this Good Samaritan?**
  - a. A businessman
    - i. Obviously travels the road regularly
    - ii. Has a beast in tow – carrying goods no doubt
    - iii. Has resources – wine and oil and money on a dangerous road
    - iv. Knows the inn keeper

**Principle: A just society is based on private property. It is a moral and economically superior arrangement. Flourishing, charity, general prosperity and better social outcomes all stem from private property. To undermine it is to undermine a cornerstone of society and lead to social and moral decay.**