

Ephesians: What's God Saying to You? What are You Going to Do About It?

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I. Introduction

God has something to say about everything but so does the world, which is why God doesn't want us to be deceived by what the world says (Ephesians 4:14). Does God have an opinion on Social Security and Medicare? Yes, because such policies and programs touch on many other issues like moral responsibility of the individual, community and the State.

II. Ephesians: What is God Saying to You and What are You Going to Do About It?

Do we have to pay taxes? Social Security and Medicare involves paying taxes. So, do we have to pay taxes? Are there any exceptions? What if the State uses our money for wicked purposes? First, God is clear; we must pay our taxes. When they asked the Lord if we were obligated to pay taxes, He clearly said, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:17-21). In Romans 13 God tells us that He put government authorities in place for several reasons, one of them is to collect our taxes (13:1-7). Second, we can take advantage of every legal tax break but we must never lessen our tax burden illegally. Those who refuse to pay their taxes will have to face the same governing authorities God put in place to collect them (Romans 13:1-2, 4-7). Third, there is one exception: the only legitimate reason for not paying taxes is if paying forced you to disobey God. For example, if the government imposed a tax rate on you that was so high it prevented you from providing for your family, then you would be obligated to refuse on biblical grounds (1 Timothy 5:8). Whenever the government authorities force us to disobey God, we must "obey God rather than men" and rely on the Lord to protect us (Acts 5:28-29). And if you believe that Social Security and Medicare taxes violate God's principles (like personal responsibility and private property rights), then you should seek to change the law through the ballot box. Fourth, what if the government uses our taxes for wicked purposes, like funding abortion? We must pay them just the same. When Jesus said, "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's" Rome was in power and their reign was not a godly one. Yet Jesus said, "Pay your taxes." And when Paul wrote Romans 13 Nero was Caesar, one of the most wicked Caesars Rome had ever known and yet God said "Pay your taxes to the authorities I appointed."

What does private property have to do with Social Security and Medicare? We pay Social Security and Medicare taxes with our money, which is our private property. There wouldn't be an issue if we collected what we put in (plus accrued interest). However, this is not what happens. Many people never got what they paid into it (in the beginning many died before they could collect. Thereafter, others died before they could collect all the money they put in). Additionally, some people collect more (some a lot more) than they put in. Finally, the money that current workers are paying into the system isn't saved for their retirement. Instead, it goes to pay for those who are currently retired. All this means that the money, the private property, which should've gone to the taxpayer (or their heirs) went to someone else. Why is this such a big deal? Because it violates property rights.

Are property rights biblical? First, our property rights come directly from God. God owns everything, including us (Psalm 24:1), so what we own and the rights that go along with it is bestowed to us from God. Second, we've had these property rights since the beginning. They began when God gave mankind the earth and everything in it (Genesis 1:28-29). Since God gave it to us collectively, you might wonder if God meant for us to own things collectively as in Socialism. No, He did not. What God meant was individual property rights. We see this throughout Scripture: God gave to each tribe of Israel their own plot of land (Joshua 13-21). Each family then got their own land and these property rights were so strong that every 50 years God wanted any lands that were used to pay a debt returned to their rightful owner, whether or not the debt had been repaid (the year of Jubilee cancelled all debts and returned all property to its rightful owner, Leviticus 25:10, 13, 23-34). Third, the 8th and 10th commandments, "You shall not steal" and "You shall not covet," acknowledge and reinforce property rights (Exodus 20:15, 17). These commands make no sense without ownership. That is, you cannot steal or covet something unless it belongs to someone else. If all property is owned collectively, then you are part owner. And since you're part owner, it's impossible to steal or covet because it's yours. Thus, the 8th and 10th commandments imply ownership.

Fourth, though our Lord isn't talking about property rights per se, He uses property rights to make a point in the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16).¹ The landowner hired many workers, the first ones made a contract for their wages. When it came time for their pay, he paid them all the same even though some only worked one hour. Those with a contract were angry and argued with the owner. He replied, "I've done you no wrong. Don't I have the right to do whatever I want with my property?" Fifth, God doesn't want anyone violating your property rights, not even the State. King Ahab wanted Naboth's vineyard but he refused to sell or trade. Ahab's wife, Jezebel, orchestrated Naboth's murder and Ahab took possession of the vineyard. The Lord then pronounced his and Jezebel's death and that of his posterity (1 Kings 21:1-24, cf. 22:31-38).

Is it a sin to accept Social Security payments? Since this violates several biblical principles like property rights, is it sin to accept Social Security and Medicare? No. In part because you paid into the system; you also don't control how the State spends taxes. But more importantly, you're obligated to pay taxes (unless it fits the above exception). However, you must be aware of the ungodliness in such systems and ensure that you properly plan for your retirement.

III. Conclusion

...that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.

¹ The context goes back to Matthew 19:16 where Jesus told the Rich Young Ruler that if he gave up his wealth to follow Him, he'd get treasure in heaven. Peter then asked, "Since we gave up everything to follow you, what will we get?" Jesus tells him what they'll get for their labor and ends with, "But many who are first will be last, and the last first," a phrase that also closes the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard. In the parable the landowner hires laborers at various times in the workday. Some work all day and make a contract with the owner for their pay. Others were hired on the 3rd, 6th, and 9th hour without a contract; the owner simply said "whatever is right I will give you." At the 11th hour he hired others who only worked one hour and got the same promise. When it came time to pay the laborers, the owner paid the last first and the first last. "For many are called, but few are chosen," likely means this: the few one-hour laborers were the only ones rewarded with a full day's wage because of their great faith in the owner's promise to pay. This phrase has a similar meaning in the Parable of the Wedding Feast, i.e., only those with the proper garment got rewarded with attendance at the Wedding Feast (Matthew 22:1-14).