

## Three challenges of poverty

### #1 It can place too much HOPE on material things.

Marxism and Capitalism share a common assumption "Ethics can be reduced to economics"

### #2 It can undermine FAITH in God.

Affirming the faith ← Social injustice → Abandoning the faith

"Natural disasters call for acts of God."

### #3 It can tempt folks to withhold LOVE from the poor.

Affirming human dignity ← Social injustice → Abandoning the poor

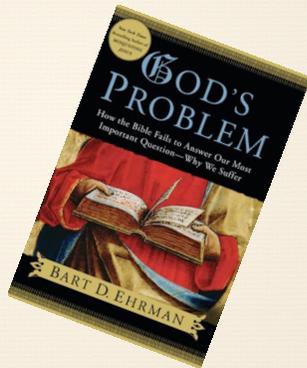
"Man cannot live by bread alone."

Both the evangelical left and right can be too materialistic.

Ron Sider David Chilton

"I just began to lose it. It wasn't for lack of trying. But I just couldn't believe there was a God in charge of this mess."

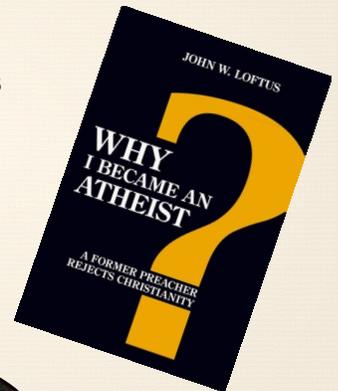
Dr. Bart Ehrman



"I had too much to live with and not enough to live for."

"My expectations of faith, prayer, the church, & God were crushed."

Rev. John W. Loftus



### 1 Corinthians 15:19

"If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied."

### 1 Corinthians 15:50

"Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable."

As nouns  
Hope, Faith, and  
Love may be gifts  
but as verbs  
they are signs.

## Why Christians cannot avoid economic policy

*Isaiah 10*

“<sup>1</sup> Woe to those who make **unjust laws**, to those who issue **oppressive decrees**, <sup>2</sup> to **deprive** the poor of their **rights** and **withhold justice** from the **oppressed** of my people, making widows their prey and **robbing** the fatherless.”

**Observation #1** *In a democratic republic the citizens bear responsibility for governing policy.*

**Observation #2** *Those in positions of power are to guard the rights and dignity of those who are not.*

**Observation #3** *The issue is justice and dignity not the forced redistribution of material wealth.*

## Two critical questions:

1. What is the state's role in economic justice?
2. Why should Christian citizens get involved in the politics of economic justice?

## The Political landscape

Socialist	Liberal	Conser.	Libert.
State control of economic issues	State control of economic issues	State free of economic issues	State free of economic issues
State control of social issues	State free of social issues	State control of social issues	State free of social issues

*Both the evangelical left and right can be too political.*

Too much faith & hope in political solutions

Too much passion associated with politics

Equating political views with spiritual orthodoxy

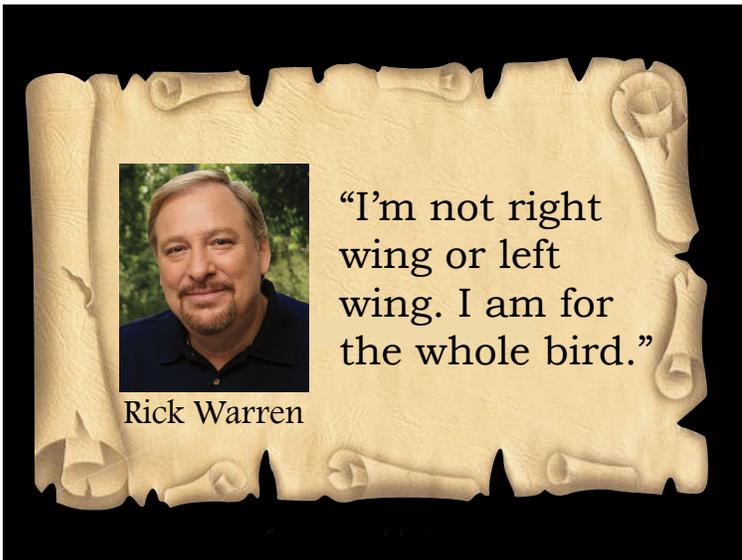
*Ecclesiastes 10:2*

“A wise man's heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man's heart directs him toward the left.”



Jim Wallis

“The media seems to think only abortion and gay marriage are religious issues. Poverty is a moral issue, it's a faith issue, it's a religious issue.”



**Why both the political left and right need to be listened to in addressing poverty.**

**Wisdom respects both:**

Spiritual needs	Physical needs
church family	biological family
individual	community
equality of opportunity	equality of outcome
short term relief	long term recovery
domestic needs	international needs
The rich are blessed	God cares for the poor

**Biblical Principles**

- The Biblical instruction on social ethics centers attention on relationships within the **Covenant Community of Faith**.
- There are **several causes** of poverty mentioned in the Scriptures, and various causes require differing responses from the Lord’s disciples.
- God has a special interest in all who are **powerless and vulnerable** (including and especially the materially poor).
- The Bible assumes the ownership of private property and calls for **personal, concrete, action** by individuals on behalf of the poor.
- The Bible does not promote the establishment of a **neo-theocracy** in a pluralistic secular state.

- All temporal concerns fade into the background when compared to the **eternal issue** of the dignity and salvation of the souls that bear God’s image.
- Since the Fall, **all institutions are flawed**, and can never of themselves bring society to some state of utopian perfection.
- **Dignity & Justice** are central themes in the Biblical teaching on poverty. God warns against granting special favors to the rich and powerful, and also prohibits giving special treatment to the poor.
- “**Profit / material wealth**” is not evil, but is an important cog in the free-market system and viewed as a positive blessing in Scripture.
- **American values** are not synonymous with Kingdom values.

**American values**

Competition

Materialism  
Nationalism  
Individualism

Compassion

COOPERATION

**Kingdom values**

Competition

COOPERATION

Compassion

# Christian & Politics

the Left	the Right
The Messiah State	Uncritical Nationalism
Social ethics	Individual ethics
Kingdom without King	King without Kingdom
Justice as equality of result primarily	Justice as equality of opportunity only
Poor are victims of rich	Poor are irresponsible
Wealth is not created but must be divided	Wealth is created and should not be divided

*Some federally run welfare programs miss the point of the real need.*

## The dignity of the individual

**They define the need as economic only.**  
- neglecting the social, political, and spiritual foundations to human dignity, and community.

**They encourage a culture of dependence.**  
- rather than a culture of confidence, responsibility, and interdependence.

**They create an inefficient welfare system.**  
- where much of the economic resources go to people who manage the system rather than to those who really need the help.

### A socialist society

is willing to sacrifice individual liberty and material productivity for material and social equality.

### A capitalist society

is willing to sacrifice material and social equality for individual liberty and material productivity.

### A Christian society

views liberty and productivity as a responsibility more than a right - and compassion with cooperation as important as competition.

*Christians can “do good” in both capitalist and socialist societies.*

## Christian capitalists

### Competition that is fair

It is motivated by the pursuit of efficiency, and effectiveness as stewards more than personal comfort and power as consumers.

### Cooperation that is proactive

It is sensitive to the well-being of the community as well as the family and the individual.

### Compassion that is sacrificial

It is free to be generous and sensitive in addressing the true needs of others, especially those without power or dignity.

### 1 Timothy 6

“<sup>17</sup> Instruct those who are rich in this present world **not to be conceited or to fix their hope on** the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.  
<sup>18</sup> Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to **be generous and ready to share**, <sup>19</sup> storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.”

**Observation #1** *The materially rich are to “enjoy” their material blessings while not attaching too much faith, hope, and love to them.*

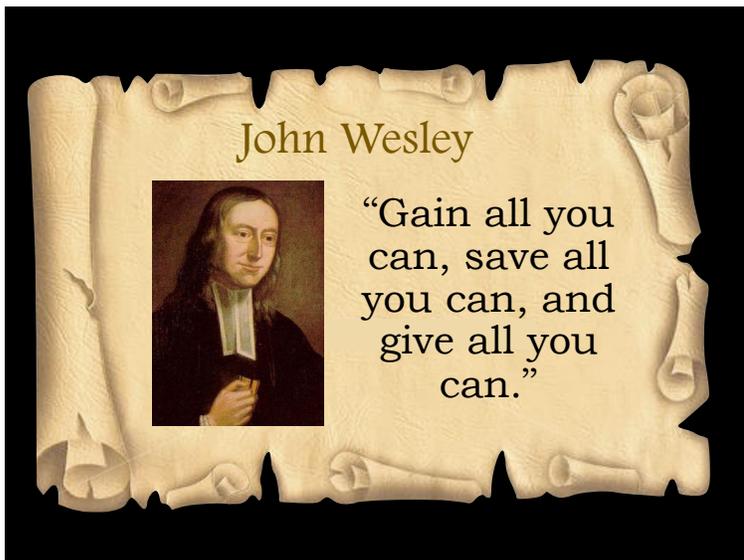
**Observation #2** *True wealth is measured in good works, generosity, and justice.*

### Ephesians 4:28

“Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to **share with him who has need.**”

**Observation #1** *God’s people are to be marked by:*  
(1) *a sense of justice*  
(2) *hard work*  
(3) *generosity*

**Observation #2** *Our work ethic should be expressed in:*  
(1) *what we do*  
(2) *how we share the fruits of our labor.*



## Many responses to poverty are superficial and misleading.

- “Live simply so others can simply live.” My consumption or lack there of may do little to address the real problem.
- **The rich prosper at the expense of the poor.** The size of the pie can increase in a healthy economy.
- **Capitalism = greed and exploitation of the poor.** Capitalism is a key to addressing poverty but it has been abused.
- **Government is the answer to social injustice.** Government can be an important part of the answer but more often it promises more than it delivers.
- **Big business is the problem.** Big business involves all strata of society. **Bad** big business and **bad** big gov. are the problem.
- **The poor remain poor.** Most of the poor are in and out of poverty over the period of a year.

- **The free market will correct itself.** History has taught us that some government controls are needed to keep things fair.
- **Socialist societies never work.** With some impressive exceptions - Singapore, Sweden, Denmark, France, etc.
- **Welfare programs don't work.** They are a mixed bag - missing the point, inefficient, and wasteful but a necessary safety net in nearly all industrialized countries.
- **The poor are too often lazy, irresponsible, & foolish.** Some are, but not all or most. There also are some Christians who are heartless, selfish, and insensitive.
- **The gospel is about saving souls not about social justice.** God is concerned about a loving response to people who can't live by bread **alone**. This implies that “bread” is needed but it is not enough. God is concerned about human dignity (which is often associated with material poverty).

## A strategy for addressing poverty

- **Respect and dignity.** Focus attention on restoring and preserving personal dignity not just giving money.
  - ✓ **Expand your social network to include the poor, powerless, isolated, etc.**
  - ✓ **Give personal attention (listening, time, emotional / spiritual support, prayer) to the poor.**
  - ✓ **Encourage the church to be proactive in promoting human dignity on all levels.**
- **Bipartisan political action.** Both the political right and left need to do more listening, less competing, and refocus on public service.

- **The family.** Promote and support the traditional marriage and family.
  - ✓ **Provide sound family models for our communities.**
  - ✓ **Promote strong family values - children first, marriage as ministry, etc.**
  - ✓ **Build a church community that supports struggling families (widows, orphans, divorced, etc.)**
  - ✓ **Support a safety net for single parents and children.**
  - ✓ **Demand sexual discipline.**
- **Education.** Encourage everyone to finish high-school.
- **The economy.** Promote and support a growing economy - tax reform (Flat tax, Fair tax).
- **The middle class.** Promote and support a healthy and growing economic middle class.

## International strategies

- **Civil rights.** Promoting the rights & dignity of all people in third world countries would make a big difference.
- **Sanitation.** Clean water is perhaps the single biggest and solvable problem in the third world.
- **Capitalism.** Developing fair and free markets has proven to be the single best mechanism for creating material wealth.
- **Christianity.** Spreading the Gospel has been the best means of promoting true wealth - peace, justice, dignity for all.
- **Representative and responsible government.** Corrupt government is a mammoth problem in the third world.
- **Emergency aid.** Prompt, generous, well directed aid from wealthy countries is needed to meet temporal crises.