

Is Marxism compatible with the Christian Faith?

Marxism is a political philosophy developed by Prussian (German) philosopher Karl Marx that focuses on class struggle and various ways to ensure equality of outcome for all people. Marxism and Marxian analysis have various schools of thought, but the basic idea is that the ruling class in any nation has historically oppressed the lower classes, and thus social revolution is needed to create a classless, homogeneous society.

Marxism teaches that the best system of government is one in which wealth is distributed equally, there is no private property (ownership of productive entities is shared by everyone), and every citizen gives selflessly to the collective.

The purported goal of Marxism is a government-run utopia in which the needs of each individual are always provided for. Ideally, the strong work hard, the inventive create technological marvels, the doctors heal, the artists delight the community with beauty, and anyone who is weak or poor or in need can draw on society's combined resources as their needs demand. When this idealistic model is attempted in the real world, it is called "socialism," "communism," "statism," "liberalism," or "progressivism," and Marxism, depending on the degree to which the model is explored and implemented.

Thus far, Marxism has never worked in real life—and, without exception, in the places where Marxism has been the governmental model, Christians have been persecuted. That's because there's a foundational difference between Marxism and Christianity, a deep divide that cannot be bridged.

There are several aspects of Marxism, as a philosophy, that put it at odds with the Christian faith. Here are a few:

1. Marxism is, at heart, an atheistic philosophy with no room for belief in God. Karl Marx himself was clear on this point when he said, "*The first requisite of the happiness of the people is the abolition of religion*" ("A Criticism of the

Hegelian Philosophy of Right," 1844). Christianity, of course, is rooted in theism and is all about God. In the Marxist model, the state becomes the provider, sustainer, protector, and lawgiver for every citizen; in short, the state is viewed as God. Christians always appeal to a higher authority—the God of the universe—and Marxist governments don't like the idea of there being any authority higher than themselves.

2. One of the basic tenets of Marxism is that the idea of private property must be abolished. Where Marxism has taken root, land owners see their property confiscated by the state, and private ownership of just about anything is outlawed. In abolishing private property, Marxism directly contradicts several biblical principles. The Bible assumes the existence of private property and issues commands to respect it: injunctions such as "*You shall not steal*" (*Deuteronomy 5:19*) are meaningless without private property. The Bible honors work and teaches that individuals are responsible to support themselves: "*The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat*" (*2 Thessalonians 3:10*). The redistribution of wealth mandated by Marxism destroys accountability and the biblical work ethic. Jesus' parable in Matthew 25:14-30, clearly teaches our responsibility to serve God with our (private) resources. There is no way to reconcile Marxism with the parable of the talents.

Marxism is ultimately about material things; Christianity is ultimately about spiritual things. Frederick Engels, a close associate of Karl Marx, said that Marx's greatest insight was that "*men must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing before they can pursue politics, science, art, religion and the like*" ("Speech at the Grave of Karl Marx," Highgate Cemetery, London. March 17, 1883, transcribed by Mike Lepore).

In other words, Marxism seeks to meet the physical needs of man and posits that, until those needs are met, man is incapable of any aspirations higher than an animal-like existence. Jesus taught, "*Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Seek first [God's] kingdom and His righteousness*" (Matthew 6:26, 33).

Marx taught, "*Seek first man's kingdom and the stuff of this world.*" Jesus' words are the antithesis of communism and Marxism, and it's one reason why Karl Marx reviled Christianity.

The utopia that Marxism seeks to develop is earthly and man-made; Christians look to the promise of the Lord Jesus to establish a perfect kingdom on earth at a future date. It maybe soon! Believers understand that, given man's sinful nature, there is no perfect system in this world. Greed and abuse of power and selfishness and laziness will taint even the purest motives.

Some people attempt to combine Christianity with Marxist philosophy. Their attempts may be well-meaning, but they are impractical. The Puritans in the New World tried communal living for a while. When the Plymouth Colony was founded, there was no private property, and all food was distributed equally amongst all, regardless of one's job (or work ethic). But that system, lacking any incentive to hard work, was soon abandoned as a complete failure. See "Of Plymouth Plantation" by Plymouth Colony Governor William Bradford for the full story.

Attempting to combine Christianity with Marxism also ignores their widely divergent views on sin, God, equality, responsibility, and the value of human life. Some people point to Acts 2:44-45 as proof that Christianity is compatible with communism: "*All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.*"

Two things must be said here: 1. This passage, as with much of Acts, is descriptive, not prescriptive; that it contains no command for the church to function this way; that it is simply a description of what the early church in Jerusalem did, to meet some unique and urgent needs. There is no indication that such extensive sharing was ever copied by other New Testament churches. 2. Second, the communal arrangements in Acts were complete. It is voluntary and motivated by the love of Christ. Any attempt to apply this to involuntary, secular (godless) communism really makes no sense. When Frederick Engels heard that some Christians were using Acts 2 to promote socialism, he wrote against

combining his philosophy with Christianity: *“These good people are not the best Christians, although they style themselves so; because if they were, they would know the Bible better, and find that, if some few passages of the Bible may be favorable to Communism, the general spirit of its doctrines is, nevertheless, totally opposed to it.”* (“Progress of Social Reform on the Continent,” in The New Moral World, 3rd Series, Nos. 19, Nov. 4, 1843, transcribed by Andy Blunden). According to Engles, the Bible and Marxism are “totally opposed.”

In short, the Bible promotes freedom and personal responsibility, and neither of those concepts lasts long under Marxism. There’s a reason why! In Marxist states such as Communist China and Vietnam and the old Soviet Union, Christians are always persecuted—the ideas espoused by Marxism are antithetical to the teachings of Jesus Christ and the differences are irreconcilable.

Recommended Resource: Politics According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture, by Wayne Grudem © gotquestions.org

As a Pastor for over 50 years, I’ve seen people battle to cope with life and struggle to make a living. I can fully understand the desire of those who are left out of the loop, to hope that the State will help them meet their needs. There is nothing wrong with helping those in need. In fact, Jesus taught this to His disciples and all His followers.

Christians fail miserably when they do not help those in need. The apostle John warns Christians: *“If anyone has material possessions and sees a man or woman in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?”* (1 John 3:17).

As Christians we are to care for those in need. Jesus was full of compassion and we must be too. Unfortunately the same sinful personal greed exists in all of us, and it is easy to “pad our own pockets” rather than show the love of Christ to others less fortunate than us.

It is true that the Bible promotes freedom and personal responsibility and neither of those concepts lasts long under Marxism. Clearly, the Bible teaches that

“If a person does not work, neither should he eat” (2 Thess. 3:10). It is true that the Government cannot provide the services we enjoy, without the income of its workers. This principle promotes personal responsibility! The healthy are to work and pay taxes that provides a better life style and enables us to “buy, sell and eat” etc according to our needs. It should not favor making the rich, richer, as Democratic programs often do. The Government is to use extra funds for needs of society, like a broader healthcare coverage, women’s health clinics, public education, educational programming and all sorts of programs that are useful for the betterment of society.

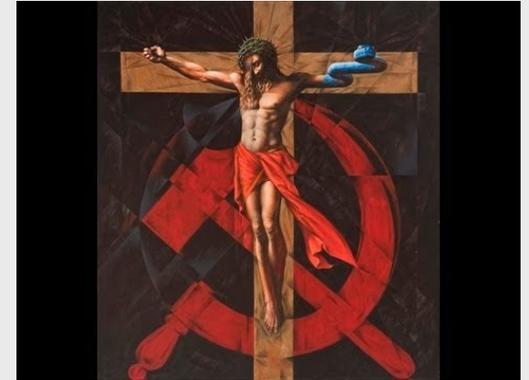
The flip side of this is the “caring responsibility” for those who are enduring hardships. Jesus told the story of the “Good Samaritan” to be an example of how we are to relate to our fellow citizens who are in dire need (Luke 10:25-37). Some argue that Jesus was a Marxist because he cared for the poor. “No way!” He supported His heavenly father God in all areas, which included that of caring for others in need.

In fact Jesus showed the Love of God in sacrificing His own life on the Cross. He stated clearly, that He had the power to call, 10,000 angels to set Him free from the Roman/Jewish condemnation and judgment. But He didn’t! His sacrifice for mankind was to show God’s wonderful love for humanity. Jesus said, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him, will not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). If you believe Jesus, it can be yours.

This is the crux of the matter. It is not what philosophy or system man comes up with, but reliance upon the plans and purposes of God. Jesus love in action is without question seen in the hundreds of Missionaries around the world giving their lives to produce food, housing, clothes and a better life for those in desperate need. They are the true example of Christian love and care.

Personally, I believe the Bible and Jesus provide a better solution than Marxism and a whole host of other man made systems. I hope you do too!

Marxism and Christianity



JESUS said,
“Greater love has no one than this: than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” John 15:13

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