

Greed: Good or Bad? (part nine in a twelve part study)

There is one important guideline in the Word of God which provides insight into the “how” of government’s role in restraining the negative impact of greed upon others. It is found in Colossians 4:1, where Paul writes this –

“Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.”

What if a particular master doesn’t grant this justice and fairness? What should be the response of someone who has been victimized by economic injustice? Violence is not an option (1 Timothy 1:12-15). Finding new and better employment is always a possibility (1 Corinthians 7:21). However, an appeal to governing authority is also a legitimate recourse, often resulting in a resolution to the specific problem; as exemplified by Paul in his appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:6-12). In some instances, the by-product of such an appeal produces a ruling designed to prevent the reoccurrence of a similar injustice. Human government has the right to regulate an economy under its authority in order to insure justice and fairness.

On the other hand, when governing rulers fail in fulfilling this responsibility, what is a follower of Christ to do? The apostle Peter makes it clear that the godly response when suffering unjustly is that of patient endurance (1 Peter 2:18-20); supporting his admonition with the example of our Savior (1 Peter 2:21-25). Even James, after his righteously indignant denunciation of the rich, for withholding the pay of their workers (James 5:1-6); tells those workers to be patient and wait for the coming of the Lord (James 5:7-8).

No doubt, some Christians would infer from both Peter and James that there should be no “interference” from government with entrepreneurial endeavors; even if their behavior qualifies as unjust and unfair. I am not one of those Christians. If greed is indeed evil, then it is the God ordained responsibility of human government to place a restraint upon all evil, including that evil. The challenge for governing authority has always been that of maintaining a necessary balance. In establishing deterrents to the negative consequences of greed, human government must also encourage productive private enterprise. How? By allowing successful entrepreneurs their rightful place at the top of the food chain, while at the same time, protecting and providing for those at the bottom.

Can this hypothetical balance be achieved outside the confines of an ivory tower think tank? Absolutely! The secret is hiding in the plain sight of Romans 13:1-7. It requires the implementation of fair minded **regulation** as a means of protection (13:1-4); and appropriate **taxation** as the source for provision (13:5-7). When wise rulers are in charge of a nation, this beneficial balance will exist for everyone.