



## Profit, wealth distribution, and the poor

### Leviticus 19.<sup>9-10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. <sup>10</sup>And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the Lord your God.

To illustrate Yahweh's requirement as stipulated in today's reading, we will ask the reader to use their imagination. Imagine, if you will, an American football field. Now, imagine that field covered with a crop of corn, maize. Now, imagine that the owner is commanded to leave five feet around the edges of the field unharvested. This amounts to roughly 5% of the crop. Imagine that the owner is informed that the poor are to be invited into the field to gather the unharvested corn. Imagine that this practice is put into law.

Now, imagine how the American capitalist, and much of the American public is likely to respond. Actually, the reader need not use their imagination. We already know how they will most certainly respond: "Redistribution of wealth!" "Socialism!"

"The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase Its Profits." Thus spake Milton Friedman in the title of a 1970 New York Times article. He and such aberrant economic ideology, adopted by Ronald Regan and still holding sway in the American politics, has dominated western economic attitudes, policies, and practices for the past 50 years.

Consistent with this immoral doctrine that declares "profit" as the greatest societal good,

corporate lobbyists galore have spent the past 50 years writing regressive business and tax legislation and then engaging in what is essentially legalized bribery to convince unethical, immoral, and greedy lawmakers to pass that legislation into law. Such laws have made it possible for American companies such as Walmart and Amazon to pay zero... ZERO!... taxes in spite of their billions in profits. They have been absolved of all responsibility to society.

So greedy are most American businesses and stockholders for tainted profits that they do not even permit employees to poop, as news outlets have recently and consistently reported concerning Amazon's practices. At the same time, these employees are paid a wage that can only barely and very generously be called "living wages." Healthcare, when it is offered, requires out-of-pocket expenses paid by the employee such that they seek medical help only under the most extreme cases. This means that employees live with physical ailments that might easily be remedied. It means that they come to work sick and, during a pandemic such as that of 2020 and 2021, become the source of increased infection and death.

These attitudes and practices are but a few examples among many that could be identified. Such obscene economic mantras as that of the wizard, Friedman, and immoral practices such as those of Amazon have been used to redistribute wealth upwards. They have been used to give "free lunches" to business and the wealthiest Americans through regressive tax policies and deregulation. They have been used to strip away public assistance programs intended to assist the vulnerable poor, who are always among us. They have been used to justify an economic inequality that is unsustainable and dangerous to American democracy. All of this in the name of "corporate profit" and stockholder gluttony.

It is all madness. It is difficult to imagine anything more at odds with the mind and will of God, his economic principles in general, and the principles outlined in today's reading in particular. Now, we do not propose that farmers literally do as stipulated in today's reading. We do not contend that American business literally practice such policies. But we do propose, contend, and demand that American business and American politicians extrapolate the economic principles that are found in such passages and then act upon such principles.

Nothing could be clearer, for example, than that the Lord doesn't give a hoot about profit, and profit margins. He does expect the businessman to sacrifice a portion of profit to be dedicated to the assistance to the vulnerable. He did, in fact, legislate such ideals and expectations into law. And he does promise that the businessman will be sufficient for his needs as he does so.

Call all of this anything you want. Call it socialism, if you must. I don't care. What it is in reality, though, is godliness. The mind and will of the Lord. The only way to enduring economic welfare and security for all.

We would be remiss if we did not remind, or, where necessary, warn, those who claim to have taken upon them the name of Christ: There is no divine expectation that those who profess discipleship to him and claim enlightenment by his word, would ever imagine that they could put private profit above the care of the poor—not only the domestic poor, but the foreign-born poor as well. There is no divine expectation that those who claim to be disciples of Christ would ever imagine that they could righteously support public policy and practices that put profit above the care of the poor—domestic or foreign.

So at odds with the Lord's economic principles is American capitalism with its pathological obsession with profit above all else that it is no exaggeration to name it idolatrous and anti-Christ. It is gross blasphemy that the nation's self-professed Christians are some of American capitalism's most ardent proponents and greatest champions. These can only be called "false brethren," acolytes, apparently, of any and every idolator and anti-Christ who comes along and promises them oodles of mammon.

Today is as good a time as any to reexamine our attitudes and behaviors toward profit and the vulnerable poor, and, where necessary, repent. It is as good a time as any to reexamine our attitudes and responses to public policy as they relate to corporate profit and the care for the vulnerable poor, and, however possible, agitate for public policy more in line with the mind and will of God. Today is as good a time as any to examine our discipleship and be sure it is in harmony with character of Jesus, the ultimate servant of the vulnerable.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!