

Biblical Privacy

As I've been studying the Bible I noticed a rather interesting theme occurring throughout the Bible - namely the concept of privacy.

Private Property

One place privacy comes up is with respect to the issue of private property. The 8th commandment for example states, "**You shall not steal.**" **Ex 20:15** But this affirms the concept of private property. For you could restate this "you shall not take someone else's property." This is affirmed in particular cases in the Law of Moses and also in the New Testament as well. Here are some particular laws in Exodus 22:1-4 concerning theft.

- 1 "If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he must pay back five head of cattle for the ox and four sheep for the sheep.
- 2 "If a thief is caught breaking in and is struck so that he dies, the defender is not guilty of bloodshed;
- 3 but if it happens after sunrise, he is guilty of bloodshed. "A thief must certainly make restitution, but if he has nothing, he must be sold to pay for his theft.
- 4 "If the stolen animal is found alive in his possession— whether ox or donkey or sheep— he must pay back double.

So we see not only the concept of private property being affirmed here but also the idea that restitution for theft was not simply a returning of the goods, but apparently involved restoring even more than what was stolen.

In contrast to these ideas Communism does not affirm the concept of private property. Godless systems of government will actually steal people's private property.

Some may disagree and point on that in the book of Acts it says that "*All the believers were together and had everything in common.*" **Acts 2:44** Or more specifically, "*All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.*" **Acts 4:32** But was that forced upon them by the religious institution or by some government system, or was that the case because they were simply generous and out of their free will gave of their private property?

Notice the case of Ananias and Sapphira of Acts 5. After they sold their field to give to the church Peter noted to them, "*Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal?*" **Acts 5:4** Here Peter affirms that they were under no obligation to sell it or to give the money to the church. This is vastly different than communism which steals private property rather than relying upon generosity.

But what about taxes? Are they a form of stealing also? It is written, "*Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.*" **Rom 13:5-7** Historically though while even affirming property rights, governments will often abuse the tax system to take more than what is fair. The American Revolution, for example, was a result of unfair taxes which amounted to theft. Not respecting God-given property rights not only makes people upset, it also upsets God.

Generosity

Generosity cannot be legitimately practiced unless ownership has first been established. People cannot be generous with other people's property. They can only be generous with their own property. Now here's something you may be surprised to hear, "**Tithing is NOT an act of generosity.**" Christians of course are not obligated to tithe. It is never taught in the New Testament letters. Rather it was associated with the Mosaic law along with other particular rules and regulations like Sabbath observing have to do with the Mosaic society. The Israelites were obligated to tithe. They would pay the priests and Levites for their religious service as well as support other social programs. But as it was an obligation, it was not an act of generosity.

In contrast to this the New Testament teaches that "*Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*" **2Cor 9:7** No specific amount is given, rather generosity is left up to whatever one decides in his heart to give. It is not to be done under a sense of compulsion. So if you feel you're being compelled to give then it isn't an act of generosity, but rather you're acting out of a sense of obligation, which is different.

Paying Christian ministers for their service is not an act of generosity. Christian ministers have the RIGHT to get payed for their service, and as such their congregations are obligated to pay them. "*the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.*" **1Cor 9:14** Yet in this same chapter in 1Cor, Paul generously gives up his right to get paid, so as to further the gospel. "*What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it.*" **1Cor 9:18** Though few ministers of the gospel seem willing to follow Paul's example in this. But that's their free choice, not their obligation.

Property Rights in Marriage

1Cor 7:4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. (NASB)

Here's an interesting perspective on adultery. If your spouse has authority over your body and you have authority over your spouse's body, then adultery might be viewed as a form of theft. Someone is doing something with your property which you haven't authorized.

Privacy and Secrecy

Another aspect of privacy is the idea of secrecy. For example one of the rewards mentioned in Revelation is **Revelation 2:17** *"To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it."* So also Christ and the church is allegorical of the marriage relationship (**Eph 5:32**) Yet in a marriage relationship sexual union is to be done in private. Notice also that Moses met with God in the tabernacle in the Holy Place where others were not allowed. Indeed the temple itself speaks of God's privacy in the Holy of Holy's. Those who enter inappropriately are killed. The concept of God's Holiness has in it the concept of God's Privacy. Therefore we should respect the concept of privacy. Respecting property rights means also to respect privacy rights.

The godly will respect others property rights and privacy rights.

The ungodly will violate others property rights and privacy rights.

Being secretive is also part of God's nature.

"Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel." Isaiah 45:15

**"The secret things belong to the LORD our God,
but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever" Deuteronomy
29:29**

The Gospel is also likened to a revealed secret

"Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him— " Rev 16:25,26

Secret Service

Also concerning privacy, what one does in private is more reflective of one's true convictions. Jesus for example taught his followers to keep their generosity private - at least to the extent in which they were able. *"But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."* **Matt 6:3,4** So also with prayer, *"But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."* **Matt 6:6** And as there is particular virtue in such secret service, one should not put as much weight concerning public, visible, "in the lime-light" type of service reflective of the scribes and Pharisees of which Jesus' commented upon in **Matthew 23**.

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