

Initially, it was my intent to write about Biblical principles as a guiding influence in American society, government and our criminal justice policies and practices; however, I was called away. While away, I decided in favor of writing about the loss of Biblical principles as a guiding influence in American society, government, and specifically our criminal justice system's policy and practice. As with any endeavor, I always ask God to guide my thoughts and actions. I generally will ask: Where is it You are leading me in this undertaking, thinking, etc...? Of course the answer is almost always the same --- towards Him. With respect to this topic, I must also ask: "How do I do this with objectivity and be true to those principles required of me?" I'm not as certain about this answer as I am to the first question? So, I will default to an important Biblical principle, one that should guide all efforts: do good, be good, and pursue good. This will invariably lead one to the center of His will, as He is the source of all good. Often times, doing good is easier said than done, especially within the confines of a maximum security prison, where I reside. Such requires a Herculean effort to be principled in reason and conduct. It is possible though; I see it every day, by those who are endeavoring to be humble. I even enjoy some success, although such is not the result of my efforts, but that of God and faith. Humility is the most important of all Biblical principles, because without it nothing is possible and with it all things are possible.

Exploring then, the thesis of Biblical principles and their influence upon the American reality, it seems appropriate to start at our founding. It is well established that Biblical principles certainly influenced our founders and the formation of our government and our values as a society. Such was just a reality of the times, regardless of one's spiritual beliefs or religious affiliations. Throughout our history and the evolution of our society, Biblical principles were perhaps the single greatest influence upon our reason, conduct, and values. Over time however, our adherence to such principles became less a matter of faith and more to do with their simple truths and moral correctness. I am only 52 years old and in this short span of time, I've seen a significant shift in our reasoning and conduct as a nation and people. I believe this shift to be attributable to our abandonment of those principles that guided us to greatness in the first place. Not only have we abandoned such principles, but by and large chastise the application of such, even forbidding it, in some circumstances. This shift in principle and the resultant conduct has adversely affected our influence and standing within the world community.

Nowhere is this more striking than in our criminal justice policies and practices. This is significant for two reasons: the effect such has upon the poor communities as well as the lower socioeconomic class; and also the inference it broadcasts to the rest of the world about our society and Americans as a people. There seems to be an inherent callousness in our criminal justice policies that not only serve to deny hope, but also imply a defeatist attitude. This is most apparent in the inhumane sentences awarded and the incredible numbers of prisons and people incarcerated, and of course, the billions of dollars spent. Money spent for no appreciable return in the form of reductions in crime, addiction, and recidivism. They are a failure by any measure applied. I find this most remarkable since there are vastly more successful criminal justice models out there, ways of working smarter versus harder, if you will. Models that demonstrate real results in the form of decreased crime, addiction, and recidivism. The Scandinavian countries are such a model, so it seems queer to me that we continue on with practices that are clearly a failure and continue to grow exponentially more expensive and burdensome. I attribute this to the abandonment of Biblical principles by government and that our criminal justice systems and policy are a practice of government. Often times, the profit motive defined by government becomes very narrow and selective because of the nature of some who comprise government and are responsible for it's actions. That includes vast numbers of personalities, including the electorate.

I believe it to be fair and appropriate to explore the question of who profits from mass incarceration, and what are their motives? Biblical principles influencing such efforts would no doubt, result in change and I suspect a greater return more uniformly distributed throughout our society. In closing, I would like to share the following two thoughts that have come to my mind as I've been writing this. The first, a quote I read once attributed to Victor Hugo: " If a soul is left in darkness sins will be committed. The guilty one, however, is not the one who sins, but the one responsible for the darkness." The second is this: would God approve of our actions as it relates to our criminal justice policy and those as it relates to ours as an electorate?

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