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Biblical Criticisms of Crony Capitalism

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Abstract

Modern capitalism is often condemned not simply due to market failure (efficiency grounds), but increasingly due to unjust results (equity grounds). Yet many of the underlying moral concerns are more appropriately targeted on what is often called crony capitalism, where government-granted privileges lead some to profit at the expense of others. This paper examines the morality of crony capitalism from a Biblical perspective, comparing the processes used in crony capitalism against the Biblical requirements for justice, impartiality, loving thy neighbor, and the role of government.

JEL Codes: Z12, H11, D72

Keywords: Crony Capitalism, Biblical Morality, Free Markets

I. Introduction

Critics of capitalism often cite so-called market failure--whether monopoly, externalities, or public goods-- as reasons that necessitate government involvement in the economy. Yet perhaps the most powerful arguments have nothing to do with technical debates over how to improve the efficient operation of markets. Instead, the morality of capitalism is questioned, often based on unequal market outcomes. How can a system reward a hedge fund manager with a salary greater than one *billion* dollars while another hard working person can barely rise above the poverty level? Yet many believe this outcome is not a natural result of markets, but rather that the “system is rigged” against the so-called “99%” in favor of an elite 1%. And indeed they are at least partially correct, as the “system” does favor some over others. Whether artificially low interest rates that benefit holders of financial assets, or special interests that prosper with beneficial legislation, many government policies inevitably result in financial winners and losers.

However, the system that enables this is not free market capitalism, but rather the mixed economy that brings politics into the allocation of capital.

While questions of inequality are debated, e.g., how much inequality is acceptable to gain the efficiencies of a market system (Mankiw, 2013), this is not an acceptable question when considering the morality of capitalism from a Biblical perspective. Simply put, the Bible has nothing to say about wealth inequality *per se*. The Bible has much to say about social responsibility to the poor, as well as condemnation of unjust riches, yet it is silent on income differentials in and of itself. For example, the Bible records Job as the richest man of the East (Job 1:3), and yet he is lauded as one who was righteous before God (Job 1:8), and further he claimed to have aided the poor by “breaking the fangs” of his oppressor (Job 29:17). There are many other examples of rich people in the Bible, concurrently with those who were truly in poverty. The continual call of the Bible is to lift a poor brother up, not equalize any outcome. While income (or wealth) inequality is not a concern for Biblical morality, what we now call Crony Capitalism can nevertheless be critiqued biblically. In this paper, we will review how Crony Capitalism confers benefits to some while harming others, and compare this to Biblical commandments to treat people impartially and to love one’s neighbor, and how government action that facilitates Crony Capitalism goes beyond its God-ordained role.

II. What is Crony Capitalism?

A major area of ideological disagreement over the benefits of capitalism is precisely the disagreement on what constitutes capitalism. Just as free market proponents suggest those condemning free markets misunderstand what capitalism is, we must be careful to define crony capitalism, not simply using a pejorative term that is effectually *ad hominem*. Holcomb (2015)

offers a useful framework for what he more broadly (and perhaps helpfully) calls political capitalism, which can be summarized (with slight modification) as:

An economic system defined by a symbiotic exchange relationship between government and business elites, whereby business elites' profitability and maintenance of status is enhanced by regulation, spending, and design of the tax system and government elites' position and status depends on funding by business elites. There is a level of control of business by government and a level of control of government by business through the development and design of institutions to maintain elite status of both government and business elite defining political capitalism as an economic system.

While not included in this summary explicitly, there is the implicit reality that crony capitalism is--at best--zero sum: the benefits that elites accrue are simply transfers from those that are on the political outside. The question of the morality of crony capitalism is thus heavily based on the morality of transfers from the politically powerless to the politically powerful.

III. Biblical Principles and Application

As defined above, in crony capitalism those with political power are able to use their influence to direct public policy in ways that favor their interests, at the expense of those without such political power. As we will see below, while the Bible often talks in terms of the unrighteousness in how the rich treat the poor, in most of the condemnations the instrument of oppression is via political power—not market power, so Biblical condemnations could easily replace the term “rich” with “politically powerful” and the poor with “politically weak”, as the rich were inevitably political powerful and vice versa.

A. Injustice of Harming the Politically Powerless

Consider the book of Isaiah. The prophet Isaiah was charged by God with providing a verbal prosecution of covenantal unfaithfulness of Israel; Isaiah brings the initial charges in chapters 1-5. Israel failed to meet the standards identified in the Law and thus were going to be subject to the penalties of rebellion (ultimately expulsion from the promised land) (Sproul, 2005, p. 949). In the introductory argument of chapter one, the Israelites stand condemned for rebellion. In v2, the prophet says

“Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth; For the Lord speaks, “Sons I have reared and brought up, But they have revolted against Me.”

Although Israel is God’s beloved son, they have nonetheless rejected him and are in rebellion. They are wicked, as seen in v4,

“Alas, sinful nation, People weighed down with iniquity, Offspring of evildoers, Sons who act corruptly! They have abandoned the Lord, They have despised the Holy One of Israel, They have turned away from Him.”

They are weighed down with iniquity, “evildoers” who “despise” God. And what does corporate behavior look like in this situation? V23 reveals one indication of injustice,

“Your rulers are rebels and companions of thieves; everyone loves a bribe and chases after rewards. They do not defend the orphan, nor does the widow’s plea come before them”

A key characteristic of a rebellious nation is corruption in public officials. “Everyone loves a bribe,” as public officials seek gain from their office. The flip side of the coin is that the politically powerful give these bribes to pervert justice: the rulers are condemned since their taking of a bribe corrupts the public official against the politically weak, “the orphan...and the widow.” Isaiah continues his indictment in 3:14-15 with a similar charge:

“The Lord enters into judgment with the elders and princes of His people, “It is you who have devoured the vineyard; the plunder of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean

by crushing my people and grinding the face of the poor?” declares the Lord God of hosts.”

Once again the politically powerful (elders and princes) are exploiting the politically weak (the poor). The “plunder” of the poor (Hebrew transliteration *gēzalah*¹) is elsewhere explicitly translated as robbery (e.g., Ezekiel 18:7, 12, 16). No doubt the leaders of the day had some sort of rationalization as to why their actions could be justified, but God knows their heart and will have none of it: their corrupt favoritism is equated with theft from the most vulnerable. God sees the end result of their actions, their “crushing my people” and “grinding...the poor” and thus condemns the politically powerful.

Lest there be any doubt that partiality towards the politically powerful is the root problem of these wicked rulers in Isaiah’s indictment, he subsequently (11:3-5) contrasts their corruption with the rule of the promised Davidic King (the messiah, or Christ):

“And He will delight in the fear of the Lord, and He will not judge by what His eyes see, Nor make a decision by what His ears hear; But with righteousness He will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth.....”

This righteous king will decide with *fairness* (Hebrew transliteration *miyshowr*), a term that in Hebrew often means plain or plateau, and is sometimes translated as straight or level (e.g., Ps 26:12), and when expressing normative content is translated as righteous or fair. Thus a righteous judge has a *level* standard, one that applies *equally* to all, and is the measure of fair actions on the part of the rulers. Partiality stands condemned on the part of rulers, whereas a righteous judge will show no favoritism. Other verses likewise support this conclusion; in Amos 5:12 we see:

“For I know your transgressions are many and your sins are great, you who distress the righteous and accept bribes and turn aside the poor in the gate.”

¹ All references to the original Hebrew or Greek language are found from the Strong’s concordance feature of the website Blue Letter Bible, blueletterbible.org.

In this case, bribery once again stands condemned for harming the poor—this is illustrative of “many transgressions” and “great sins.” The poor are harmed “in the gate,” since in ancient Israel justice was meted out by city authorities in the gate into the city (as is clear in Amos 5:15, “Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate.”).²

To the extent that crony capitalism privileges the politically powerful at the expense of the politically weak (usually the poor), it meets the same standard of condemnation. This particular condemnation is not reserved simply for Israel as a covenantal nation; God’s standard for justice is required for both covenantal and gentile nations (e.g., Ninevah in the book of Jonah).

In addition to the explicit corporate condemnation, the Bible also condemns individuals who exploit the poor, who at least implicitly have no corrective support from the judicial system. In Jeremiah 22:13, we see:

“Woe to him who builds his house without righteousness and his upper rooms without justice, who uses his neighbor’s services without pay and does not give him his wages,

In this section, Jeremiah is comparing the wicked king Jehoiakim with his relatively righteous father Josiah. Josiah was said to “do justice and righteousness,” (v15), because he “judged the cause of the poor and needy, “ (v16). God, however, calls out Jehoiakim for woes, as his lust for material wealth causes him to effectively steal from the poor by failing to pay their wages. Lev 19:13 commands the Israelite landowner to pay wages promptly, yet Jehoiakim did not do this. This failure to pay contractually agreed-to wages is again condemned in the New Testament, in James 5:4,

² For a similar condemnation, see also Proverbs 22:22-23

“Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.”

The Bible does not provide the reason why these laborers had no recourse against the landowner’s failure to pay wages; yet one thing is clear—the elite who were not fearful of earthly justice were told to fear God’s justice. The politically powerful (even if in the sense of not needing to fear the civil magistrate) who exploit the political powerless stand condemned.

B. God’s Standard: Impartiality

The implicit Biblical requirement for rulers to not show partiality above is explicitly found in Leviticus. The book of Leviticus describes how the people of God are to be set apart from all other nations--how they are to be holy. In Lev 19, this is clearly announced in v2, “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.” As Brueggemann says in the New Interpreters Bible commentary,

To illustrate just how all embracing this standard is, a list of examples is given in chap. 19 from almost every area of life. So representative and so wide is the range of the laws and commandments found in this chapter that it might be characterized as a brief Torah. Moreover, the refrain that is repeated no less than fifteen times is: “I am the LORD [your God],” which marks the end of almost every one of the sixteen paragraphs... (Brueggemann, 1994, 1131)”

In describing how the Israelites are to be holy, it is perhaps not surprising that Lev 19 corresponds well with the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) as noted by Hartley (1992, p. 310) and Brueggemann (1994, p. 1131). The Decalogue, which is the heart of the moral law of God, can be summarized as loving God and loving your neighbor, as Jesus did in Matt 22:36-40. Thus Lev 19 shows how the Israelites are to love God, which is inseparable from loving their neighbor (1 John 4:20). And what does loving their neighbor look like? Lev 19:9-18 highlights

this concern, with loving your neighbor including compassion for the poor. Gleaning laws, which require Israelites to leave some of the harvest for the poor, are found in vv 9-10, and v13 prohibits oppressing your neighbor by failing to pay agreed-to wages. But lest this concern for the poor be misunderstood as God favoring the poor over the rich, v15 clarifies what holiness looks like:

¹⁵ “You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.

V15 is arranged chiastically, “moving from general to specific then from specific to general Hartley, 1992, p. 311),” so that the verse’s “construction encloses the *appearance* of the rich and poor in the courts of *justice*. Judges are warned to *judge* the case on its merit without any regard of the *appearance* of the litigant, whether rich or poor,” (emphasis in original, Milgram, 2000, p. 1642). V15 describes how we should treat one another in legal settings: we should not do any *injustice* (Hebrew transliteration *evel*, meaning iniquity, wickedness, unrighteousness). This is because God himself does no injustice, as seen in Deut 32:4, “The Rock! His work is perfect, For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without *injustice*, Righteous and upright is He.” For the Israelites to be Holy, they must be like God, who does not do any injustice. The second half of v15 expands on what injustice looks like: partiality in how we treat others in matters of justice. In this particular case it is partiality in court, but as we will see below, God demands impartiality in many of our dealings with one another.³ Impartiality is a principle method for us to love one another; indeed, impartiality is embedded in the Golden Rule (Matt 7:12), “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them.” Surprisingly, the

³ While impartiality is generally the standard, in certain situations the Bible allows treating people differently. For example, believers have higher responsibilities to care for their immediate family (1 Tim 5:8) than others. While called to do good to all, believers are especially encouraged to do good to other believers. Yet in matters of justice, the standard is impartiality.

admonition is not simply to be impartial toward those that we might be inclined to support—the powerful who might be in a position to reward us—although that prohibition is there. It also extends to prohibiting partiality to the weak or to the poor--those who while they may not be in a position to reward us, might nevertheless capture our sympathies.⁴ This is surprising because, as the Jewish philosopher Philo says “this comes from one who has filled practically his whole legislation with injunctions to show pity and kindness...bidding us give wealth to the poor, and it is only on the judgment seat that we are forbidden to show them compassion (quoted in Milgram, 2000, p. 1643).” We are told not to allow these factors to sway our judgment—to do so would make us not like God; we would not be holy.

There is some disagreement among scholars as to the extent of this passage. Is the impartiality prohibited here limited to a legal setting or is it more broadly applicable? The New Jewish Publication Society (NJPS) Bible confines this prohibition to judicial proceedings, as do the rabbis (Milgrom, 2000, 1642). In Noth’s commentary on Leviticus (1977, p. XXX), he argues that the plural form of the verb in “you shall not do” indicates the prohibition is to the entire community, and extends to personal relations as well (Milgrom, 2000, 1642). Milgrom adds that the reference to neighbor at the end of v15 should be to everyone, “in all one’s personal dealings.” Hartley (Hartley, 1992, p. 310) suggests that the “mixture of second person plural and singular forms is then a rhetorical device by which the speaker addresses both Israel as a community and each member of that community.” This suggests that while it certainly is a requirement for the collective nation of Israel to practice justice through impartial treatment of others, it is also a standard for the individual within the collective nation in how they treat others.

⁴ For a similar biblical argument, see also Exodus 23:1-3, especially v3, “nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his lawsuit.”

The biblical injunction against partiality is not limited to the O.T.; an N.T. application is found in James 2:1-13.

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. ²For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, ³and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," ⁴have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? ⁶But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? ⁷Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called? ⁸If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. ⁹But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. ¹¹For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹²So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. ¹³For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

In this passage, James warns against treating a rich person with respect in an assembly of believers, while treating a poor person badly. In v1, the warning is against showing partiality (Greek transliteration *prosōpolēmpsia*); this word is found 3 other times in the N.T. (Col 3:25, Rom 2:11, Eph 6:9). In those verses, we see that God does not show partiality with respect to salvation and justice; God does not show favoritism in the sense that man does. God does actively foreknow some and not others, yet God's choosing is based on his omniscience and His purposes. Man, however, judges unjustly by a favoritism that is characterized by external appearances, not the true inner essence of a situation. As the LORD tells the prophet Samuel (1 Sam 16:7) when he rejects one of David's brothers to be king: "But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." Since humans cannot see another person's heart, and thus potentially judge justly, we are

required to judge impartially. In the passage above, James suggests--if anything--external appearances are exactly the opposite of reality and are not to be trusted. To do so, would make one an unrighteous judge.

Many scholars link the passage in James 2 to the prior passage in Lev 19 (Johnson, 1982; Kaiser, 1985; Martin, 1988). First, many of the verses suggest a legal setting, with forensic words (vv 4, 6, 9) (Martin, 1988, 59). James condemnation may indicate unrighteousness in the context of a church disciplinary hearing, with partiality being shown to the rich contra the requirement of Lev 19:15 (Martin, 1988, 58). But perhaps the strongest linkage is James pointing to the “royal law” in v8, “you shall love your neighbor as yourself,” which is found in Lev 19:18 (Hartley, 1992, p. 1136). James is arguing that failure to be impartial is in fact a violation of the great commandment, and makes one a lawbreaker (Martin, 1988, 58-59). Since Crony Capitalism is dependent upon government favoritism (or partiality) for some that comes at the expense of others, it stands condemned biblically.

C. The Second Greatest Commandment: Love One Another

The passages above show that favoritism is not a minor matter, but at the essence of how we are called to love one another. This requirement is both at the individual level as well as collectively. The negative injunctions (e.g., do not be partial) are the necessary flip side of the coin of positive command to love another. Perhaps one of the most amazing Biblical truths is that humans, alone in all of creation, are said in Genesis 1 to be created in the *image* and *likeness* of God:

²⁶ Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” ²⁷ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. ²⁸ God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the

earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

As Shephard says,

“Although explicit references to man as the image of God are comparatively infrequent in the Bible, the truth itself underlies the whole relation between God and man and is therefore the presupposition of the entire Biblical account.”

The profound meaning of being in the image and likeness of God is well beyond the scope of this paper, yet one key facet is applicable: we are all *equally* created *Imago Dei*. Every human is a descendant of Adam and Eve (Acts 17:26), and has dignity in accord with being created in God’s image. This special dignity is the explicit Biblical rationale for the death penalty (Gen 9:6), and continues in seriousness as Jesus implicit rationale for threatening condemnation to those who curse a brother (someone made *Imago Dei*) in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:22). If there was ever any misunderstanding of our intrinsic equality in the sight of God, the Apostle Paul provides clarification in Galatians 3:28,

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

The fundamental reality of our equality with one another--because of our intrinsic dignity in being created *Imago Dei*--leads to commands to love one another (John 13:14), to overcome our fallen nature’s selfishness by considering others as better than ourselves (Phil 2:3), and to “have the same care for one another (1 Cor 12:25). These positive commands are how we love one another, which itself is a natural fallout of truly loving God. To the extent that we do not love our brothers, we do not love God (1 John 4:20). Thus the two greatest commandments (loving God and loving others, Matt 22:37-40) flow out of who we are--creatures made in God’s image.

Crony Capitalism fails to meet the Biblical standard from this positive sense as well. Loving our neighbor means we must care for them; this is opposite from Crony Capitalism which gains privilege to extract wealth from the general public on the basis of official favors, not through effective market service. Exploitation of the general public via Crony Capitalism therefore is indicative ultimately of a failure to love God.

D. Role of Government

There is almost always an ostensible public interest rationale advanced that leads to the cronyism we see today. As Milton Friedman famously said in discussing regulations like the minimum wage (available on YouTube), “there are always in these cases two groups of sponsors – there are the well-meaning sponsors and there are the special interests, who are using the well-meaning sponsors as front men.” Or as Yandle (1983) says, there are often bootleggers and Baptists supporting a public policy. Given the subjective assessment of costs and benefits, and the corresponding impossibility of a true social welfare function, how are we to decide whether one person’s valued public policy is really just cronyism in disguise? One way to evaluate the benefits of government action is to test it against Biblical principles: is a government action outside the scope of its Biblical mandate?

Perhaps the most explicit guidance on the role of government can be found in Romans 12:17 - 13:7⁵:

12¹⁷Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. ¹⁸If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. ¹⁹Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. ²⁰“But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. **13**¹Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. ²Therefore whoever resists authority

⁵ 1 Peter 2:13-20 provides an abbreviated but similar message to Romans 13.

has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. ³ For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; ⁴ for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. ⁵ Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. ⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. ⁷ Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

While space precludes a full-blown exegesis of this text (see Schreiner, 1998 and Moo, 1996 for complete analysis), we can nevertheless see a framework for understanding the role of government. Schreiner (1998, p. 677) argues that this section of Romans is not a new idea, but follows from the major division in Romans beginning in Chapter 12: how we think about government is part of the transformation in our thinking as we become increasingly conformed to the image of Christ. The most anarchist libertarian of today would have nothing on the Zealots of Palestine in their concern over government, and yet the Apostle Paul is admonishing all that our minds need to be transformed in how we think about government. In v1, we learn that in God's establishes all rule and authority; the most wicked government is not outside his sovereign power. Government is His minister (v4), and it "bears the sword" to bring God's wrath against evildoers, and should encourage through praise good behaviors (v3). Schreiner (1998, p. 685) argues that "the judgment and wrath of the government upon evildoers anticipates and foreshadows God's judgment and wrath on the day of the Lord." We are to obey government both because of the threat of earthly punishment, as well as because to disobey earthly authorities is to disobey God (v2, 5). The Apostle Paul is writing this letter to the Roman Christians who are subject to persecution, and yet surprisingly he calls the rulers "servants of God." Moo rightly notes that Paul uses the term submission (or subjection) in v1, not obedience, and this implies being rightly ordered in the world's hierarchy (Moo, 1996, p. 809). This implies that

government is not supreme; a Christian is not duty-bound to obey a wicked command that goes outside God's will. As Moo (1996, p. 809-810) says, "Government is more than a nuisance to be put up with; it is an institution established by God to accomplish some of his purposes on earth. On the other hand, we must not...put government in a position relative to the Christian that only God can hold."

So what does this "avenging of evil" refer to? Romans 12:17-19 gives us context: the vengeance we demand as individuals is reserved for God, and God will inflict his wrath on the evildoer. Thus what we see in Chapter 13 is God's earthly plan for vengeance: government is His minister to "bear the sword," and apply the "wrath of God" to evildoers. As individuals we don't need to necessarily wait until the final judgment day for wrongs to be righted; government should punish evildoers that violate God's laws in how they treat others and their property. Thus government is explicitly called to maintain order according to God's law, and in a positive sense called to encourage good behavior through public praise. So what are our initial conclusions for the role of government? The coercive power of the state is allowed by God, but only in application against evildoers. This suggests protection of life and property through police and the military is consistent with God's purposes. In the positive sense, the government should support Godly living and action through public praise and encouragement.⁶

IV. Conclusion

Crony capitalism stands condemned by its very title, which is why the debate over what constitutes markets and capitalism is important. Yet aside from the pejorative descriptive title,

⁶ There are other biblical passages that hint of the limits of government power. In 1 Kings 21, King Ahab's wife Jezebel has Naboth killed because he refused to sell the king his vineyard, and God through the prophet Elijah condemns him. Rulers do not have right over property that is given to individuals by the Lord. In Deuteronomy 17:16-17, future kings are warned against gathering large armies and amassing much "gold and silver" from the people. In 1 Samuel 8, when Israel yearns for a king, God warns them that a future king will take the best of their fields, crops, and children as it grows large. This is given as a warning, suggesting that this is not good for the people—where there will be transfers of wealth from the politically powerless (the people) to the politically powerful (the King and his entourage).

the very process of crony capitalism that enriches politically powerful elites at the expense of the broader politically powerless is condemned when one considers Biblical principles of justice, fairness and our command to love one another. While it is perhaps possible to argue for a broader view of government⁷, examination of specific references to government in the Bible leads to a more restricted view. Authority for government marketplace intervention of the type associated with crony capitalism (e.g., bestowing favors on some at the expense of another) cannot be found in scripture.

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⁷ As in Jim Wallis's view, found here: <https://sojo.net/articles/caring-poor-governments-biblical-role>

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