

A Biblical and Historic Understanding of Private Property
It's important to understand what the Bible says about private property. It's also worth noting that the Founding Fathers drew heavily from Scripture in forming their beliefs as they established America.

Biblical Perspective
The foundation of Christian beliefs about private property begins with the understanding that we are all stewards of what God has given us. God created the heavens and the earth. Only after He made the heavens and the earth did God create humanity—male and female—and bless them, commanding them to "fill the earth and subdue it."

- Psalm 24:1 - "The earth is the Lord's and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein."
- Genesis 1:1 - "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."
- Genesis 1:27-28 - "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it."
- Genesis 2:15 - "Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it."

The Abrahamic Covenant

- Genesis 12:1-3 - The Lord said to Abram…I will give you a land…'I will make you into a great nation…'"
- When the Israelites were enslaved, God did incredible miracles to free them and lead them to Mount Sinai, where He gives them the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments

- Two of the Ten Commandments deal with private property.
  1.) Thou Shall Not Steal
  2.) Though Shall Not Covet
- The Bible says you do not take someone else's stuff, and you don't even dream of taking someone else's stuff.

Samuel Warns Israel that Kings will Take their Property

- 1 Samuel 8 the Israelites ask for a King and Samuel warns the people of Israel of the dangers of having a king, and one of the things he warns them about is that a king will take their property.
    - 1 Samuel 8:10-18 - *"So Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who asked him for a king. And he said, 'This will be the behavior of the king who will reign over you: He will take your sons and appoint them for his own chariots and to be his horsemen, and some will run before his chariots. He will appoint captains over his thousands and captains over his fifties, will set some to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and some to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers. And he will take the best of your fields, your vineyards, and your olive groves, and give them to his servants. He will take a tenth of your grain and your vintage, and give it to his officers and servants. And he will take your male servants, your female servants, your finest [a]young men, and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take a tenth of your sheep. And you will be his servants. And you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and the Lord will not hear you in that day.'"*

<u>Attacks on Private Property</u>

- Whatever the Bible says, the devil's game plan is exactly what God says—but in reverse.
- Throughout history, we see attacks on private property.
- Karl Marx in his *Communist Manifesto* said, *"The theory of the Communists may be summed up in a single sentence: the abolition of private property."*
    - (Karl Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, trans. Frederick Engels (1969, original 1848), 22.)
- In the 2030 Agenda from the World Health Organization they have a line that states simply, *"You will own nothing, and you will be happy."*
    - This originates from a 2016 essay by Danish politician Ida Auken, titled "Welcome to 2030. I own nothing, have no privacy, and life has never been better." The piece was published as part of the World Economic Forum (WEF)'s series on future scenarios.

<u>The Founders Perspective on Private Property</u>

- The Founding Fathers were students of the Bible.

John Locke

- He was the individual most quoted by the Founding Fathers during the American Revolution.
- In his *Two Treaties of Government*, Locke writes that God has not given kings authority over the land.
    - John Locke says in Chapter V: Of Property, and again in Chapter IX: Of the Ends of Political Society and Government (Section 124): *"The great and chief end,*

therefore, of men's uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property."

- In Chapter II: Of the State of Nature (Ch II, Section 6), Locke further expounds on private property.
    - Locke writes, *"The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges everyone: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions."*

Samuel Adams

- Leader of the Sons of Liberty and known as the Father of the Revolution.
    - He wrote the first ever publication from the Committee of Correspondence where he says, *"Among the natural rights of the Colonists are these: First, a right to life; Secondly, to liberty; Thirdly, to property; together with the right to support and defend them in the best manner they can."*
      ("The Rights Of The Colonists, A List of Violations Of Rights and A Letter Of Correspondence, Adopted by the Town of Boston, November 20, 1772," *The Life and Public Service of Samuel Adams*, ed. William V. Wells (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1865), I:502.)

The Declaration of Independence

- Thomas Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence:
    - *"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."*
- Some may wonder why he wrote "happiness instead of property."
- The Virginia Declaration of Rights (written June, 1776) was very influential on Jefferson.
    - The author of this was George Mason, known as the Father of the Bill of Rights. And he had two reasons why he didn't sign the Constitution.
        - 1.) It didn't have a bill of rights.
        - 2.) It didn't end slavery.
- Section 1 of the Virginia Declaration of Rights states: *"That all men are by nature equally free and independent and have certain inherent rights, of which, when they enter into a state of society, they cannot, by any compact, deprive or divest their posterity; namely, the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety."*
  (*The Federal and State Constitutions, Colonial Charters, and Other Organic Laws*, ed. Francis Newton Thrope (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1909), VII:3813.)
    - *This document comes out the month before the Declaration.*
    - *Some people tried to advocate that owning slaves was considered their "property" which is likely why they didn't use the word "property" in the Declaration.*

John Dickinson

- Dickinson was known as the Penman of the Revolution and wrote 12 “Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania.” (He was also a member of the Continental Congress, Governor of Pennsylvania and Delaware and Signer of the U.S. Constitution.)
- One of the early essays he wrote stated,
    - *“Let these truths be indelibly impressed on our minds—-that we cannot be happy without being free—that we cannot be free without being secure in our property—that we cannot be secure in our property if without our consent others may as by right take it away.*
      (John Dickinson, “Letters from a Farmer: Letter XII,” 1767, *The Political Writings of John Dickinson* (Wilmington: Bonsal and Niles, 1801), I:275.)

John Adams

- In 1787, John Adams wrote a work titled ADefense of the Constitution of the Government of the United States of America, and in it he said,
    - *“Property is surely a right of mankind as really as liberty.”*
- Jefferson agreed, echoing:
    - *“The moment the idea is admitted into society, that property is not as sacred as the laws of God and that there is not a source of law and public justice to protect it, anarchy and tyranny commence. If "Thou shalt not covet," and "Thou shalt not steal," were not commandments of Heaven, they must be made inviolable precepts in every society, before it can be civilized or made free.”*
      (John Adams, *The Works of John Adams*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1851), VI:8-9.)

Arthur Lee

- Lee was a diplomat during the American Revolution who helped secure our alliance with France. He wrote to Great Britain in defense of Americans saying,
    - *“The right of property is the guardian of every other right, and to deprive a people of this, is in fact to deprive them of their liberty.”*
      (Arthur Lee, *An Appeal to the Justice and Inhabitants of the People of Great Britain, in the Present Dispute with America* (London: 1776), 19.)

James Madison

- Madison, while serving in Congress in 1792, wrote an essay titled “On Property,” stating,
    - *“Government is instituted to protect property of every sort; as well that which lies in the various rights of individuals as that which the term particularly expresses. This being the end of government, that alone is a just government which impartially secures to every man whatever is his own.”*
- He continues:
    - *“More sparingly should this praise be allowed to a government where a man’s religious rights are violated by penalties, or fettered by tests, or taxed by a*

hierarchy. Conscience is the most sacred of all property; other property depending in part on positive law, the exercise of that being a natural and inalienable right. To guard a man's house as his castle, to pay public and enforce private debts with the most exact faith, can give no title to invade a man's conscience, which is more sacred than his castle, or to withhold from it that debt of protection for which the public faith is pledged by the very nature and original conditions."
(James Madison, "Property," originally published in *The National Gazette*, March 29, 1792, *The Writings of James Madison*, ed. Gaillard Hunt (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1906), VI:101-103.)

The Founders' Perspective on Property Tax
The Founding Fathers' perspective on property tax was nuanced. Many believed that property taxes could be permitted, provided they were approved by the people's elected representatives.

John Jay

- He was the Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court. He wrote a letter to the New York legislature in 1778, telling them
    - *"It is the undoubted right and unalienable priviledge of a freeman not to be divested, or interrupted in the innocent use, of Life, Liberty or Property, but by laws to which he has assented, either personally or by his Representatives. This is the Corner Stone of every free constitution, and to defend it from the iron hand of the Tyrant of Britain, all America is now in arms; every man in America being most deeply interested in its preservation. Violations of this inestimable right by the King of Great Britain, or by an American Quarter Master; are of the same nature, equally partaking of Injustice, and differing only in the degree and continuance of the injury."*
    (John Jay, "A Hint to the Legislature of the State of New York," 1778, *The Founders Constitution*, https://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/amendV_due_processs12.html.)

John Marshall

- Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court. John Marshall delivered the opinion of the Court in the case *McCulloch V. Maryland* in 1819, wherein he wrote:
    - *"It is admitted that the power of taxing the people and their property is essential to the very existence of government and may be legitimately exercised on the objects to which it is applicable to the utmost extent to which the government may choose to carry it. The only security against the abuse of this power is found in the structure of the government itself. In imposing a tax, the legislature acts upon its constituents. This is, in general, a sufficient security against erroneous and oppressive taxation."*
    (*McCulloch v. Maryland*, 17 US 316, 428 (1819).)
- He stressed that the legislature acts upon its constituents, and if it's the will of the people, then they are not acting against the people.

Daniel Webster

- Webster, known as the "Defender of the Constitution," was a noted attorney and served in the US House and Senate for nearly 30 years.
- He gave a speech in 1820 in Plymouth on the 200th anniversary of the Pilgrims. He said,
    - *"For the purpose of public instruction, we hold every man subject to taxation in proportion to his property, and we look not to the question whether he himself have, or have not children to be benefited by the education for which he pays. We regard it as a wise and liberal system of police, by which property, and life, and the peace of society are secured."*
    - (Daniel Webster, "Discourse in Commemoration of the First Settlement of New England, Delivered at Plymouth, on the 22d Day of December, 1820," *The Speeches of Daniel Webster, and His Master-Pieces*, ed. Rev. B. F. Tefft (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1854), I:101)

While the Founders were not opposed to property taxes, they believed there should be boundaries, safeguards, and clear limitations in place. They consistently emphasized the importance of protecting the stability of the people's ownership of property.

Joseph Story

- Justice on the U.S. Supreme Court, author of *Commentaries on the Constitution of the United States* and called the "Father of American Jurisprudence," was appointed to the Court by James Madison.
- In 1829, he was giving a speech at Harvard and said,
    - *"The sacred rights of property are to be guarded at every point. I call them sacred, because, if they are unprotected, all other rights become worthless or visionary."*
      (Joseph Story, "Discourse Pronounced Upon the Inauguration of the Author as Dane Professor of Law in Harvard University," August 25, 1829, *The Miscellaneous Writings, Literary, Critical, Juridical, and Political of Joseph Story* (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1835), 453.)
- He continued:
    - *"What remains to nourish a spirit of independence, or a love of country, if the very soil on which we tread is ours only at the beck of the village tyrant? –if the home of our parents, which nursed our infancy and protected our manhood, may be torn from us without recompense or remorse?"*
      (Joseph Story, "Discourse Pronounced Upon the Inauguration of the Author as Dane Professor of Law in Harvard University," August 25, 1829, *The Miscellaneous Writings, Literary, Critical, Juridical, and Political of Joseph Story* (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1835), 453.)
- Story believed that if you take people's property, you will remove the spirit of patriotism.
- Story continues:
    - *"There can be no freedom where there is no safety to property or personal rights. Whenever legislation render the possession or enjoyment of property*

precarious—whenever it cuts down the obligation and security of contracts—whenever it breaks in upon personal liberty or compels a surrender of personal privileges, upon any pretext, plausible or otherwise—it matters little whether it be the act of the many or the few, of the solitary despot or the assembled multitude; it is in its essence tyranny."
(Joseph Story, "Discourse Pronounced Upon the Inauguration of the Author as Dane Professor of Law in Harvard University," August 25, 1829, *The Miscellaneous Writings, Literary, Critical, Juridical, and Political of Joseph Story* (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1835), 447.)

- He is warning them, you don't want to bring people to the point where they are not sure they will be able to keep their property.

<u>There is Moral Clarity on the Issue of Property Tax</u>

- In the Bible, property is considered to be an inheritance for your children.
    - 1 Chronicles 28:8 - *"Now therefore, in the sight of all Israel, the assembly of the Lord, and in the hearing of our God, be careful to seek out all the commandments of the Lord your God, that you may possess this good land, and leave it as an inheritance for your children after you forever."*
    - The Bible gives clarity on the limitations of the moral decisions of government. The government was not to take what God had given someone. The Government (the prince) is not permitted to take people's property. Ezekiel 46:18 - *"Moreover the prince shall not take any of the people's inheritance by evicting them from their property; he shall provide an inheritance for his sons from his own property, so that none of My people may be scattered from his property."*
- Anything that threatens, endangers, or challenges what the Bible says makes someone a good man must be considered a bad law. The government should not make it more difficult for someone to be a "good man" according to Biblical standards.
    - Proverbs 13:22 - "A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, but the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous."
- The Year of Jubilee is another example of God's affirmation of private property.
    - In that designated year (which occurred every 50 years, or once a generation), God commanded that each family's land be returned to them. What God had given to them, He intended to remain with them.

Conclusion

For many Americans today, property taxes now threaten their ability to keep their homes and their property. Some are living in homes that are fully paid off—homes they worked for or that were passed down through generations—and yet rising property taxes have reached levels that make it impossible for them to remain in their homes, or which allows government to take their lifelong home from them. This is immoral.

Legislators should oppose what is immoral and promote what is morally good. This issue deserves careful consideration by lawmakers in states across the country to ensure that property taxes are applied in ways that are both moral and just.