



We the Taxpayers

Resource

Lesson 5- Values to Tax By
Video Script

Now you know the parts of a tax system – what we pay, what we don't pay, and what we get – but what does it really mean if we could do it right? Is it just a fair tax system like Robin Hood? Taking from the rich and giving to the poor? Or like a symphony where everyone is playing their part? Or like a beautiful – but imaginary – creature? I think we have a better shot at a fair and just system than we do at finding a unicorn, so today we can dig in to the values we can hold our taxes to, and their role in the bigger picture of our federal budget.

Luckily, we don't have to figure out the principles of a just system on our own. Advocates representing Muslim, Christian, and Jewish traditions have been in conversation for years, and with the current debates they have begun the work of setting our principles down together. Whether it comes from tzedakah of the Jewish tradition, the Gospels in the Christian tradition, or zakat from the Muslim tradition, all of our faiths emphasize our call to work towards a more just economic system.

Let's see what they think an ideal system would include:

First – the revenues raised should be enough to pay for the public needs of society, and set us on a sustainable path. An ever-growing deficit is hardly healthy, and a responsible plan addresses that. As people of faith, we must also commit to reducing poverty. This means that while we navigate this road to sustainability, those who can afford to pay more, ought to.

Second is taking control of our expenditures! We should be carefully targeting this powerful tool to incentivize activities that are good for all of us, like secondary education. If the expenditure isn't helping the economy or has been written simply to allow more and more wealth to accumulate in one place, it's not worth the tax dollars we're missing out on.

Third, a just system would be progressive. Meaning, those who are able to give more do and the burden is not passed to those who have the least.

Fourth, the system should help us to be a more equitable society. Credits like the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit reduce poverty, encourage work, and give all of us the promise of a better future.

Fifth, we shouldn't stop thinking creatively. New taxes that could reduce deficit should offer incentives for behavior which clearly benefits the common good. What new behaviors do we want to increase?

And finally, the tax code should be efficient and simple. We should all understand our taxes, and be able to file them confidently. Low-income families should spend money on things other than tax preparation.



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These folks know what they're talking about. They've actually created a whole plan for our federal spending, outlining the priorities of communities of faith. For us, it's about restoring economic opportunity, ensuring through a progressive revenue system that we have adequate resources for responsible people and programs, prioritizing the true security that comes from relationships and not military might, meeting our immediate needs, accepting our responsibility to the next generation as well as to aging Americans who have contributed to their country throughout their lives, responsibly using the gifts of creation, providing healthcare to all, and affirming the role of government (and tax funded programs) in accomplishing all of these goals.

It won't be easy, but the decision to follow these values is a simple one.

It's up to us to decide what we want our taxes to do, and we are called by faith leaders of today just as strongly as we are called by the rich history of our traditions to a common purpose and concern for the common good. Our commitment to each other is as compelling today as it has ever been, and we understand the way we use and share resources can bring us closer to each other, and to our faith, or drive us apart. So now, we're left with the question – what is it that we want?