

“The Poor You have with You Always”

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction: Mark 14:7

- A. James 1:26-27 - Three qualifications for religion God accepts:
 - 1. It must affect the way we treat other people
 - 2. It must affect the way we treat the helpless
 - 3. It must affect the way we live before others
 - 4. God expects us to be like Him - Psalm 68:5
- B. Our faith is measured by how we treat those in need - James 2:15-17
 - 1. Faith that does not motivate Christians to compassionate action is not true faith.
 - 2. There is a difference between academic acceptance (belief) and faith.
 - 3. Faith motivates one's heart to put his body into action - James 1:22
- C. God has always commanded His people to care for the poor.
 - 1. Deut. 15:11; Psalm 82:3-4
- D. Jesus instructed Christians to give preference to the poor - Luke 14:13-14
- E. The apostles commanded it as essential to salvation - 1John 3:17-18
- F. The New Testament church cared for the poor from the beginning
 - 1. Acts 2:44-45, 4:32 - From the Day of Pentecost
 - 2. Act 6:1-6 - Deacons were ordained to care for needy widows
 - 3. 1Tim 5:3-16 - Timothy was commanded to preach the care of widows.
 - 4. 2Cor. 8:1-15 - It is the responsibility of churches
 - 5. James 1:27 - It is the responsibility of individual Christians

I. POVERTY IS AN URGENT PROBLEM IN THE WORLD TODAY

- A. Poverty is a relative term. Some feel poor because others are much richer.
 - 1. Most Americans do not consider themselves wealthy, because others have more.
 - 2. We live in the richest nation in the history of the world, and perhaps the most ungrateful and entitlement minded people in the world
 - 3. 99% of Americans are rich by world standards.
 - 4. The combined income of 41 of the poorest countries in the world is less than the income of the poorest state in the US
- B. What we call poverty in the US is rich in comparison to the rest of the world
 - 1. The official poverty line in America is \$22,050 for family of four per year.
 - a. People at this level qualify for government assistance.
 - 2. 75% of the poor in the US have a car; 1% of the people in the rest of the world own a car.
 - 3. 81% of the poor in the US have a phone; 15% of the people in the rest of the world have phones
 - 4. The average American makes \$85 per day; 80% of the rest of the world lives on less than \$10 per day; in Africa, the average person lives on 46 cents per day
- C. Hunger is a major problem in the world today. 34,000 children and 16,000 adults starve to death every day.

1. Americans spend \$60 billion per year on weight loss products. 71% of Americans are overweight with 38% of them considered obese. We don't know poverty and hunger in this country

II. HELPING THE POOR IS A FAITH ISSUE

- A. Our attitude toward the poor is directly related to our relationship with God. Most of us try to avoid the poor.
 1. Like the priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan, we don't want to get involved.
 2. The poor have a different lifestyle and value system than we have. They have unique hard problems we don't understand.
- B. But, what one does for the poor glorifies God - Prov. 14:31
 1. What we do for the poor blesses more than the poor; it glorifies God, blesses the poor, encourages onlookers, and makes us fulfilled
 2. Psalm 41:1; Acts 20:35; Luke 6:38
 3. One of the best feelings in the world is to have helped another with no thought of self.

III. HELPING THE POOR HAS ALWAYS BEEN DIFFICULT

A. "Great experience is required to distinguish between those who are really poor and those who beg only that they may collect money. He who gives to a distressed and sick person gives to God, and will receive a reward. But he who gives to a vagabond and parasite...gives it to men who deserve contempt for their audacity, rather than pity for their poverty." (Bishop Basil, 4th Century)

B. "Deacons rendered as great an individualizing effort as is possible in the relief of the poor. Every one received the assistance that his necessities required. Efforts were, above all, made to render the poor again capable of work, and put them in a condition to earn their own livelihood. They were directed where to find work, and were furnished with tools." ("Christian Charity in the Ancient Church" by Gerhard Uhlhorn)

- C. The best, most spiritually and physically profitable relief is done on an individual basis.
- D. To help, one must know the poor. There are six classifications of the poor. Only two of the six bear any responsibility for their poverty. Be careful not to assume that all of them brought on their poverty by bad choices or behaviors. When you make such a judgment, you sin.
 1. The oppressed poor. Evil dictators keep entire populations in poverty. (Kim Jong Un in North Korea; Bakili Muluzi in Malawi; African warlords)
 - a. The third world feudal system keeps poor locked to the land. These populations can only be helped by liberation.
 2. The uninformed poor. They don't know how or have not been taught to be anything else. (Generational poverty: taught by parents or culture)
 - a. They can be taught and helped to rise out of poverty, but it takes a long-term commitment on their part and of those helping.
 3. The disabled poor. Mentally or physically disabled through genetics or accident, no responsibility for condition

- a. Some can learn some forms of self-sufficiency, but others must be cared for long term.
- b. Those who commit to their care serve God and glorify Him, they bless the ones cared for, and they become better people for it.
- c. They unselfconsciously put God's love on display for the world.
- 4. The circumstantial poor. Poverty through unfortunate circumstances. (Economy causing job loss, hurricanes, floods, house fires, sudden loss of health from disease, accident, cancer, etc.)
- 5. The lazy poor. "He's so lazy, he wouldn't work as a taster in a pie bakery" The uninformed poor sometimes appear to be lazy, but we must form a relationship before we can tell the difference.
 - a. We do right when we help the uninformed poor; we do wrong when we assist the lazy poor - 2Thes. 3:10
- 6. The prodigal poor. He's reaping what he has sown (sin, drugs, alcohol, gambling) - Prov. 23:21
 - a. God may be working in their lives to bring them to repentance.
 - b. A prodigal son could not be helped until he chose to leave the hog pen of sin - Luke 15:8

IV. HELPING THE POOR TAKES COMMITMENT

- A. There are at least three ways we help the poor. All take commitment, money, work, and time
 - 1. Relief - Urgent and temporary aid in response to disasters. The Good Samaritan is a Biblical example.
 - 2. Restoration - Longer term response to permanently correct a grave problem; return people who experienced a crisis back to pre-crisis state
 - 3. Rehabilitation - This requires a lot of time and many tough decisions, but at some point, rehabilitation must replace relief and restoration.
- B. The poor who bear responsibility for their condition must ask themselves and honestly answer some very tough questions
 - 1. Have you changed the choices or behaviors that created the crisis?
 - 2. Do you want to be self-sufficient, and how much are you willing to do to become self-sufficient?
- C. Those who help the poor who are responsible for their condition must be careful not to sin with their help
 - 1. Help them with humility and love; never be judgmental, whether in relief, restoration, or rehabilitation
 - 2. Teach them a Biblical perspective of work and stewardship. Teach them on how to find a job. Coach them on keeping their job
 - 3. In the case of persons who are responsible for their poverty, continual relief will hinder their restoration and rehabilitation

Conclusion:

- A. Caring for the poor is not the job of the government. It is a command of God for the church in limited benevolence; for individuals on an opportunity basis.
 - 1. Preachers are commanded to teach it to Christians - Titus 3:14
- B. We are blessed, and with blessing comes responsibility - 2Cor. 8:13-14