

The Poor and Needy

Remembered by God; and the requirement of believers to consider them.

For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.' Deut 15:11

Perhaps there was never a time when there were so many poor and needy in the world. The amount of suffering (mostly inflicted by men, rarely by nature) is scandalous. There are sufficient resources in the world for everyone; but instead the few are wealthy beyond belief whilst the majority are poor and some are destitute. This is a scandal to God.

But what is the believer to think and do in these circumstances? What is God's law on this? This paper seeks to evaluate Biblical teaching on the poor and will utilise many texts to support it. It is the belief of the writer that most Christians utterly fail to either think correctly about oppression and affliction of the poor, or do anything about it in their churches. It is true that some do, thank God for them, but most do not.

Hardly anyone has the spiritual insight to understand that each believer must represent the attitude of God towards oppression in his daily conversation and testimony. Indeed, those few that do are usually misunderstood and sometimes castigated for it; worse still is the case of those who have been persecuted by other Christians for their denunciation of oppression.

Note on interpretation

In the passages from the OT we should remember that the righteous man is a type of the elect man or the new nature in the believer; the fullest expression of the righteous man is Christ. The wicked man is a type of the reprobate person, or the old nature of the believer.

These two types of men are typified throughout Scripture; hence: Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, David and Saul etc. God's eternal purpose on the earth regards salvation and this salvation is founded upon election and the predestination of all things according to God's sovereignty. Thus election and reprobation are at the heart of God's plan and are seen not only in direct Biblical teaching but also in the providential choosing of people and the typology of individuals.

In many cases the poor are to be identified as the righteous man (Ps 68:10; Jm 2:5), the believer, who is poor in spirit; the Lord's people are often poor and oppressed. The Lord hears the poor but we know that God does not hear the reprobate. Thus 'the poor' are sometimes a synonym for 'the elect'. The connotation of the Hebrew word for 'poor' (*dal*, *dallah*)¹ is weakness, powerlessness, helplessness and thus serves as a description of those who know they need deliverance. Conversely, the rich are those who need nothing and are satisfied in their own strengths and advantages; thus they are a picture of those who trust in their own strength for salvation and go to perdition.

¹ The other chief Hebrew word for 'poor' is *ani* (poor, weak, afflicted, humble). See also *ebyown* (needy).

The position of Israel

Israel was to remember that it was once a poor and needy slave

And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes. Deut 16:12

The basis of thanksgiving is to remember your past sinful condition and what a contrast it is to your present position of blessing and hope in Jesus Christ. Thus the Lord's Supper is a weekly memorial to remind us that we were once slaves to sin but have been delivered by the blood of Christ. Similarly, Israel was to remember that it was once a slave nation in Egypt and that it was God who delivered them from this oppression in a mighty way, establishing Israel as a new nation and giving them the land of promise.

The basis of Israel's riches was its former poverty; the basis of Israel's deliverance was its former oppression; the basis of her liberty was her former slavery. Israel was to remember the poor since she had once been poor and was helped by another. Remembering the poor was a testimony to God.

The Mosaic Law legislated care for the poor

- They had the right of gleaning (Lev 19:9, 10; Deut 24:19, 21).
- In the sabbatical year they were to have a portion of the produce of the fields and the vineyards (Ex 23:11; Lev 25:6).
- In the year of jubilee they recovered their property (Lev 25:25-30).
- In the sabbatical and jubilee years the bond-servant was to go free (Deut 15:12-15; Lev 25:39-42, 47-54).
- Usury was forbidden, and the pledged raiment was to be returned before the sun went down (Ex 22:25-27; Deut 24:10-13).
- The rich were to be generous to the poor (Deut 15:7-11).
- A portion of the tithes were assigned to the poor (Deut 14:28, 29, 26:12, 13).²

This reveals the mind of God regarding the necessity for men to consider the needs of the poor and disadvantaged. The corners of fields were not to be reaped, nor all the grapes of the vineyard to be gathered and the olive trees not to be beaten a second time. The strangers, orphans and widows could gather what was left. Even a sheaf that was forgotten and left in the field was not to be retrieved later. The spirit of the Mosaic Law was reaffirmed when the exiles returned from Babylon; Nehemiah ensured that the poor were cared for (Neh 8:10).

The position of Jesus

Jesus was poor

Our Lord Jesus Christ ... though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. 2 Cor 8:9

God could have sent his Son from heaven to be a royal prince leading a glorious earthly kingdom. In fact the Jews expected this and hoped for Israel to be delivered from Roman occupation as a result. In fact the Messiah was born in abject poverty, had a relatively poor upbringing and was poor and homeless all his life (Matt 8:20). The fact that the Messiah was poor, from a poor community and artisan parents, shows God's favour of the poor and the spiritual disadvantage of being rich.

² Thanks to Easton's and Smith's Dictionaries here.

Jesus sided with the poor

The Lord repeatedly warned the rich of woes that were coming to them.

Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full, for you shall hunger. Lk 6:24-25

His ministry was directed to the poor

The Spirit of the LORD *is* upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to *the* poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to *the* captives and recovery of sight to *the* blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed. Lk 4:18

Jesus commanded disciples to help the poor

You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me. Lk 18:22

He also supported the offerings of the poor.

Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. So He called His disciples to *Himself* and said to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.' Mk 12:42-44 [Two mites (*lepta*) equated to less than an American cent.]

The position of the prophets

Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, who write misfortune, *which* they have prescribed to rob the needy of justice, and to take what is right from the poor of My people, that widows may be their prey, and *that* they may rob the fatherless. What will you do in the day of punishment, and in the desolation *which* will come from afar? To whom will you flee for help? And where will you leave your glory? Isa 10:1-3

If he has oppressed the poor and needy ... Shall he then live? He shall not live! If he has done any of these abominations, he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him. Ezek 18:12-13

'The people of the land have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy; and they wrongfully oppress the stranger. ... Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads,' says the Lord GOD. Ezek 22:29-31

Thus says the LORD: 'For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals. They pant after the dust of the earth which is on the head of the poor, and pervert the way of the humble.' Amos 2:6-7

Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who *are* on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, "Bring *wine*, let us drink!" The Lord GOD has sworn by His holiness: "Behold, the days shall come upon you when He will take you away with fishhooks, and your posterity with fishhooks. You will go out *through* broken *walls*, each one straight ahead of her, and you will be cast into Harmon," Says the LORD. Amos 4:1-3

Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother. Zech 7:10

He [John the Baptist] answered and said to them, 'He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.' Lk 3:11

The position of the apostles

Paul

They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do. Gal 2:10

Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. 1 Tim 6:9-10

Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. *Let them* do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. 1 Tim 6:17-19

James

Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonoured the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Jm 2:5-6

Come now, *you* rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon *you!* Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you. Jm 5:1-6

The general position of God

The Lord is sovereign over who is poor and his purpose is to raise them up

The LORD makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up. He raises the poor from the dust *and* lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set *them* among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory. 1 Sam 2:7-8

He raises the poor out of the dust, *and* lifts the needy out of the ash heap. Ps 113:7

It is noteworthy that many of the elect are chosen from amongst the poor and the rich are continually condemned in Scripture (1 Cor 1:26-28; Lk 6:24). The Lord does not consider the accomplishments of the rich to be anything worthy, but commends the quiet patience of the poor and needy; especially if oppressed. The Lord allows some people to become rich in order for them to support the poor and use their money (in his name) for charitable purposes (1 Tim 6:17-19). When, instead, they ignore the poor and use the money for self-aggrandisement, they stand condemned. When supposed Christian preachers do this they are doubly condemned.

The symbolism of God raising the poor from the ash heap and setting them as princes is a reference to the bringing of salvation to the elect in the first instance. The elect, before conversion, are beggars and grieving in their sin. They are low, begging, and needy – pre-eminently in need of a Saviour from the oppression of their sin and imprisonment in Satan's kingdom. Thus the poor stand as a type of the elect needing the deliverance of God, a deliverance which not only takes them out of poverty but also raises them into royalty.

The poor are a test of the rich. It is the job of the wealthy to alleviate the problems of the poor and share their wealth, which God has given them. It is a means of distributing mercy. God allows some to be poor and some to be rich so that the principles of kindness, generosity and grace can be evidenced on the earth. God intends that the poor are raised up and the rich have the means to do this. When the rich obey this law then there is a testimony to God; thus the poor are raised up as God intends and the rich demonstrate the mercy of God to the weak.

However, man's sinfulness means that most often the rich not only hang on to their wealth but use it to oppress the poor, or to gain even more wealth. This is most clearly seen in the story of Naboth's small vineyard, which King Ahab desired and took, through murder, despite being the richest person in the kingdom. Riches usually result in fostering greed and cruelty.

The Lord commands consideration for the poor

They were cared for in the feasts

You shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who *is* within your gates, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who *are* among you, at the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide. ... And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who *are* within your gates. Deut 16:11,14

That they should celebrate yearly the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar ... that they should make them days of feasting and joy, of sending presents to one another and gifts to the poor. Est 9:21-22

Note that Israel's festivals involved the giving of gifts to the poor. Festivals were to give thanks to God for various matters; they were holy convocations to gather together and remember what God has done. Charitable aid given to the poor was an adjunct.

The Lord delivers the poor

'LORD, who *is* like you, delivering the poor from him who is too strong for him, yes, the poor and the needy from him who plunders him?' Ps 35:10

The Lord hears the poor

For the LORD hears the poor. Ps 69:33

The Lord provides for the poor

You, O God, provided from your goodness for the poor. Ps 68:10

The Lord maintains the cause of the poor and afflicted

I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, *and* justice for the poor. Ps 140:12

Does this mean that God favours the reprobate?

Scripture cannot be twisted to make one verse say the opposite of another verse, or for an interpretation to contradict the thrust of the teaching of Scripture elsewhere. We have taught that the modern idea of Common Grace is unbiblical and that it is apostolic doctrine to affirm that God does not favour the wicked, nor gives grace or blessing to the reprobate.³

³ Even the good works of the reprobate are condemned by God (Prov 21:4) and their house is cursed (Prov 3:33).

Therefore, the verses above which appear to imply that God favours every poor person, elect or reprobate, need qualification. Even observation and common sense shows that God does not give mercy or aid to millions of poor people, either now or in history. God blesses and saves a remnant.

The verses have to be taken to show the principle that God is on the side of the disadvantaged. That God gives mercy to the weak, sustenance to the hungry, aid to the poor and deliverance to the oppressed. He does this pre-eminently in saving the elect. In rescuing his chosen people he shows his attitude of caring for those in need. God despises those who are arrogant, careless, and trusting in their own works but reaches down to those who know their sin and realise their spiritual poverty.

God is not obligated to save all the poor, or even to save anyone at all. The wonder of grace is that God saves anyone, considering our sin and constant rebellion against him. Furthermore, many poor people are arrogant, self-focused, proud and so forth; being poor does not mean that you are righteous. God is just to leave the poor in their sins just as much as the rich. However, God saves many out of the poor; the remnant of mankind that is elected consists chiefly of poor people; only a few rich and noble are saved (1 Cor 1:26-27). Therefore it is correct to say that God hears the poor rather than the rich, or that God delivers the poor.

God's requirements of rulers regarding the poor

It is the responsibility of government to support the poor and needy

Give the king your judgements, O God, and your righteousness to the king's Son. He will judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. ... He will bring justice to the poor of the people; He will save the children of the needy, and will break in pieces the oppressor.

Ps 72:1-2, 4

For He will deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also, and *him* who has no helper. He will spare the poor and needy, and will save the souls of the needy. He will redeem their life from oppression and violence. Ps 72:12-14

Note: the first application of 'He' the king is to the King of Kings, the Lord Jesus Christ. The second application is to earthly kings (and governments) who rule nations as delegated authorities under God.

God commands rulers to govern in righteousness; their decisions must be right. This includes giving justice to the poor who have no money to get justice for themselves. Those rulers who oppress the poor will be broken in pieces.

How long will you judge unjustly, and show partiality to the wicked? Selah Defend the poor and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy; free *them* from the hand of the wicked. Ps 82:2-4

A king who sits on the throne of judgment scatters all evil with his eyes. ... A wise king sifts out the wicked. Prov 20:8, 26

Like a roaring lion and a charging bear *is* a wicked ruler over poor people. A ruler who lacks understanding *is* a great oppressor. Prov 28:15-16

The king who judges the poor with truth, his throne will be established forever. Prov 29:14

There is a generation whose teeth are like swords, and whose fangs are like knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men. Prov 30:14

Open your mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy. Prov 31:9
[Advice to a king.]

These verses show that a key part of the application of the king's justice is to defend the poor and fatherless, to give justice to the afflicted and needy. The wicked prey upon the poor and weak and so a large part of kingly rule is to scatter evil and sift out the wicked. In order to do this rulers need truth and understanding.

This is another key principle, that it requires knowledge of the truth and understanding of wisdom in order to appreciate the scope of damage to the poor. People who ignore the needs of the poor and are deaf to the cry of the oppressed have no knowledge or understanding, whether unbelievers or Christians.

This results in another principle: the need of the righteous who have understanding to open their mouth and plead the cause of the poor and needy. Christians must voice the needs of the poor and seek to do what they can about it locally. Christians must be on the side of the poor in any circumstance. If your favourite political leader damages the poor then you must cease supporting them and condemn them.

'For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now I will arise,' says the LORD; 'I will set *him* in the safety for which he yearns.' Ps 12:5

God acts in judgment on nations when the poor are oppressed. His 'arising' is to condemn the wicked oppressors and lift up the oppressed. The final expression of this 'arising' is the Day of Judgment. One test of people's character on the Last Day is how they reacted to the poor and needy.

The LORD will enter into judgment with the elders of His people and His princes: "For you have eaten up the vineyard; the plunder of the poor *is* in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people and grinding the faces of the poor?" Says the Lord GOD of hosts. Isa 3:14-15

Any secular nation that oppresses the poor will be judged severely by God. This judgment also applies to the Lord's own people.

Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, who write misfortune, *which* they have prescribed to rob the needy of justice, and to take what is right from the poor of My people, that widows may be their prey, and *that* they may rob the fatherless. What will you do in the day of punishment, and in the desolation *which* will come from afar? To whom will you flee for help? And where will you leave your glory? Isa 10:1-3

Shall the throne of iniquity, which devises evil by law, have fellowship with you? They gather together against the life of the righteous, and condemn innocent blood. ... He has brought on them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness; the LORD our God shall cut them off. Ps 94:20-23

It is the common practice of modern governments to support wickedness through legislation; this is to be condemned by the elect. State-sponsored unrighteousness is an evil

practice that offends God. It is frequently the poor that suffer most from unrighteousness laws. Those who decree unrighteous laws will; be condemned by God and suffer his wrath, even more so if those laws oppress the poor.

The general position of people regarding the poor

The blessedness of considering the poor and the condemnation of despising them

He who despises his neighbour sins; but he who has mercy on the poor, happy *is* he. Prov 14:21

He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, but he who honours Him has mercy on the needy. Prov 14:31

He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished. Prov 17:5

He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, and He will pay back what he has given. Prov 19:17

Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard. Prov 21:13

He who has a generous eye will be blessed, for he gives of his bread to the poor. Prov 22:9

He who oppresses the poor to increase his riches, and he who gives to the rich, will surely come to poverty. Prov 22:16

Do not rob the poor because he is poor, nor oppress the afflicted at the gate; for the LORD will plead their cause, and plunder the soul of those who plunder them. Prov 22:22-23

He who gives to the poor will not lack, but he who hides his eyes will have many curses. Prov 28:27

These verses, a small sample, establish the certainty of the individual's obligation to the law of God to take care of the poor within his sphere of influence. Christians and non-Christians alike are obligated to give to the poor.

Note a side-effect of God's law here; the one who gives to the rich instead of the poor will come to poverty, either now in temporal terms and/or at the Final Judgment. Those gullible Christians who give large amounts to fabulously wealthy 'Christian' preachers, in order to get healing, will end up poor. We have observed this to be true.

God's condemnation of those who mistreat the poor

The wicked ... Set a wicked man over him, and let an accuser stand at his right hand. When he is judged, let him be found guilty, and let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few, *and* let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his children continually be vagabonds, and beg; let them seek *their bread* also from their desolate places. Let the creditor seize all that he has, and let strangers plunder his labour. Let there be none to extend mercy to him, nor let there be any to favour his fatherless children. Let his posterity be cut off, *and* in the generation following let their name be blotted out. Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the LORD, and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out. Let them be continually before the LORD, that He may cut off the memory of them from the earth; because he did not remember to show mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man. Ps 109:2-16

The evidence is overwhelming! It is God's law that all people consider the needs of the poor and weak whenever possible and do not ignore them, still less, take advantage of them.

God will severely judge those people who preyed upon the poor and did not show them mercy.

The case of the reprobate doing good to the poor – are they blessed?

Again we must affirm that God does not bless or favour the reprobate in any way. They are doomed; vessels fitted for destruction (Prov 16:4; Rm 9:22; 1 Pt 2:8; Job 21:30). Therefore, the verses above cannot mean that the reprobate who do good to the poor are blessed.⁴

Most of the verses above are instructions, or commands, that are fundamental to God's law; the righteous man must do good to the poor. The person that does good to the poor is the one who fulfils God's law and this is only done by the elect with faith.

But what of the altruism of unbelievers? What of the good and philanthropic acts that non-Christians do for the poor?

This has been a problem for theologians for centuries but the answer is the same now as that which Augustine gave 1600 years ago and Calvin re-affirmed 500 years ago. The very best deeds performed by unbelievers are only 'splendid sins'; they are incapable of doing spiritual good. Romans 3 makes this clear:

As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one.' 'Their throat *is* an open tomb; with their tongues they have practised deceit'; 'The poison of asps *is* under their lips'; 'Whose mouth *is* full of cursing and bitterness.' 'Their feet *are* swift to shed blood; Destruction and misery *are* in their ways; And the way of peace they have not known.' 'There is no fear of God before their eyes.' ... Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight ... But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed ... even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Rm 3:10-23

Only those who are righteous by faith in Christ can perform spiritual acts of goodness that are looked on with favour by God. Only those men who fear God can do good that is commended by God. Good deeds are those which are done in Christ for the glory of God; the reprobate are incapable of doing this. However, in the measure which unbelievers did good to the poor God will take that into account in the accountability of their punishment on the Day of Judgment. Thus philanthropists will have a lesser degree of condemnation than war criminals or unjust politicians.

The position of believers towards the poor

So, even if we had no clear NT instructions on this matter, we have had enough evidence already to realise that believers who obey God's law will do good to the poor, and will see this as a high priority. But God re-emphasises this in statute, in proverb, in poetic psalm, in prophetic guidance, in the words of Christ and in apostolic example and didactic instruction.

⁴ It must be understood that God only blesses Christ and all those who are united in him. God does not bless this material creation with grace. This is why the whole creation must be burned up at the Last Day to be reconstituted as a new creation. Only that which is in Christ can receive grace, mercy and blessing.

The need for believers to consider the poor

If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs. ... For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.' Deut 15:7-11

He who mocks [derides] the poor reproaches his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished. Prov 17:5

Blessed *is* he who considers the poor; the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble. The LORD will preserve him and keep him alive, *and* he will be blessed on the earth; you will not deliver him to the will of his enemies. The LORD will strengthen him on his bed of illness; you will sustain him on his sickbed. Ps 41:1-3

He sets the poor on high, far from affliction, and makes *their* families like a flock. The righteous see *it* and rejoice, and all iniquity stops its mouth. Whoever *is* wise will observe these *things*, and they will understand the lovingkindness of the LORD. Ps 107:41-43

Here we have a word of wisdom; the wise man observes the fact that God favours the poor and understands his mercy towards them. The believer must not harden his heart against the needy. If you ignore the needs of the poor you are not wise and not following God.

The righteous considers the cause of the poor, *but* the wicked does not understand *such* knowledge. Prov 29:7

Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke? *Is it* not to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, Your healing shall spring forth speedily, And your righteousness shall go before you; The glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; You shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I *am*.' Isa 58:6-9

But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just. Lk 14:13-14

Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judaea. Acts 11:29

On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. And when I come, whomever you approve by *your* letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. 1 Cor 16:2-3

See that you abound in this grace also. 2 Cor 8:7 [That is, remember the poor in Judaea suffering in a famine.]

They [the Jerusalem apostles] desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do. Gal 2:10

Do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. Heb 13:16

We also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? 1 Jn 3:16-17

These verses do not need comment; their application is obvious and they show the importance of believers helping the poor.

The need to condemn those who mistreat the poor

Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, but such as keep the law contend with them. Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the LORD understand all. Prov 28:4-5

It is required of believers that they are discerning regarding the events going on around them. Far too many Christians just accept the status quo. They ignore the suffering in this world and focus all their attention of having a good social time in church during the week and enjoying an emotional release in superficial worship on Sunday. This is to be condemned. Believers must discern the wickedness behind political strategies that oppress the poor and speak out against it; they must not support it by their silence or they are included in the responsibility for it.

Much worse than this is when foolish Christians praise wicked men. Sadly, this happens very frequently. Thousands of Christians voted for Tony Blair and praised him during the Iraq War when he was a liar who manipulated Parliament into an illegal war that killed over a million innocent civilians. Such Christians share in Blair's wickedness and will answer to God for it, losing rewards in the process. In the Iraq War Christians should have supported the poor, weak, infirm, elderly, women, children and innocent workers who were killed by American snipers and US / British artillery and bombs (including illegal munitions).

When an American Predator drone kills 98 people, including three generations of one family at an Afghan wedding (supposedly to try to kill one insurgent leader), then Christians should condemn President Obama for war crimes and support the poor Afghan innocent civilians. Oppression of the poor, weak and needy must be condemned as an offence to God.

God's word is clear, Christians must contend with the wicked.

It is astonishing to me that many Christians simply ignore war crimes and the needs of foreign poor people and support a wicked western regime simply because it calls itself 'Christian', something it plainly is not.

The condemnation of justifying the wicked who mistreat the poor

He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, both of them alike *are* an abomination to the LORD. Prov 17:15

The righteous man condemns wickedness, whether it is the direct actions of an individual or the policies of an unjust government. It is an offence to God to justify, support and defend all unrighteous policies. Similarly, it is wrong to vote to support a whipped MP whose government brings in evil legislation [this would not apply to independent rebels in a party].

Any government policy that damages the poor, which worsens their lot, or which disadvantages them is to be condemned.

Repercussions of all this

Does this mean that we become political activists?

No; not at all. This world is not our home and it is doomed to worsening wickedness followed by destruction by burning. Our world is where heaven is on earth in the restored world that God re-creates after the Day of Judgment.

The realm of action for the individual believer and the local church is their neighbour. The true Christian does not seek to get government to change its policy – a hopeless task which is governed by much higher, dark, world powers than national parliaments.

The believer seeks to do good to those within his sphere of influence; first to the fellow needy believer and then to those outside. If the whole church in this world did this there would be a transformation overnight. Instead, most believers give money direct to their churches where it is usually squandered upon buildings, maintenance and unbiblical offices.

However, the believer is called to be a shining light, a testimony to the truth all the time. This means that oppression of the poor is something to cry out about; it is a part of the Christian witness. Whilst we do not engage in social action or political lobbying, we must stand for the truth and in our daily conversation speak out for the poor and condemn those who oppress them, whether it is an oppressive government, a repressive movement or a local council. But above all we must do actual good, first to our brethren and then to our unbelieving needy neighbour. Let us seek the will of God in how we do this.

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. Gal 6:10

Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version
© Thomas Nelson 1982

Paul Fahy Copyright © 2012
Understanding Ministries
<http://www.understanding-ministries.com>