

THE CHURCH & THE POOR

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Introduction

Many dismiss this problem with the quotation "The poor you have with you always" (Mt 26:11; Mk 14:7; Jn 12:8), not realizing that Jesus added (Mk) "whenever you wish, you can do them good."

Want to look briefly at whole problem of poverty and what Christians can & ought to do about it.

Causes of Poverty & Prosperity:

Since one is opposite of other, will look at causes in form of pairs of opposites:

1. Laziness/Diligence

Prov 6:6-11: go to ant for example; provision in advance; danger of sloth
Prov 10:4-5: negligence => poverty; diligence => riches
Prov 12:24: diligence => rule; slackness => forced labor
Prov 13:4: sluggard craves but gets nothing
Prov 14:23: all labor => profit; mere talk => poverty
Prov 15:19: way of sluggard = thorns (vs. highway)
Prov 16:26: worker's appetite works for him
Prov 18:9: slothful brother to destroyer
Prov 19:5: idle will suffer hunger
Prov 20:4: don't plow, then beg in harvest
Prov 20:13: don't love sleep => poverty
Prov 21:5: diligence => advantage; haste => poverty
Prov 21:25-26: desire of sluggard kills him; always craving; righteous give & don't withhold
Prov 23:21: drowsiness => rags
Prov 24:30-34: land of sluggard overgrown
Prov 27:23-27: diligence in care for flocks
Eccl 4:5: fool folds hands, eats own flesh
Eccl 9:10: do everything vigorously
Eccl 10:18: idleness => collapse of bldg.
Eccl 11:4ff: wind-watcher doesn't plant
Eph 4:28: let robber steal no more, but labor to give to needy
2 Th 3:10: if any won't work, don't eat

2. Extravagance/Thrift

Prov 12:27: lazy wasteful, diligent thrifty (KJV, LB, NIV)
Prov 21:17: love of pleasure => poverty

Prov 21:20: wise stores up, foolish devours all
Prov 23:20-21: big eaters & drinkers become poor

3. Disobedience/Obedience

See blessings/curses of God's covenant w/ Israel
Lev 26:3-13: blessings
14-33: curses (note esp vv 19-20,26)
Deut 28:1-14: blessings (esp vv 4-5,8,11-13)
15-68: curses (esp vv 17-18,21-24,38-44,47-48)

4. Disaster/Blessing

Not necessarily related to one's goodness
Job 1-2: disaster not due to his sin
Ps 73:3-14: wicked sometimes prosper

5. Persecuted/Persecuting

Most passages deal with imprisonment or death
Job 1 & 2: an unseen persecution by Satan
Rom 8:35: hardship, famine, nakedness in personal context
1 Cor 4:9-13: apostles hungry, thirsty, in rags
Heb 10:32-34: confiscation of property
Heb 11:35-38: poor clothing, destitute
Rev 7:13-17: from tribulation: hunger, thirst, exposure

6. Oppressed/Oppression

Not for sake of faith, but just because weak
Ps 12:5: God will protect weak who are oppressed
Ps 62:10: do not trust in extortion, robbery
Prov 3:31: don't envy violent man
Prov 14:31: oppressor of poor shows contempt for God
Prov 22:22-23: don't exploit poor, crush them in court; God will defend them
Prov 28:3: ruler who oppresses poor
Prov 30:11-14: those who devour poor
Eccl 4:1: oppression under sun
Eccl 5:8-9: don't be surprised at govt. oppression; it's profitable!
Isa 58:6: God's kind of fast is ending injustice, helping oppressed
Jer 21:12: responsibility of govt. to rescue oppressed
Ezk 22:29-30: people of land extort, rob, oppress, so God will destroy land
Amos 5:11-12: rich oppressing poor
Amos 8:4-6: some hints on technique
Micah 2:1-2: judicial oppression?

Hab 2:5-11: greed => oppression
Zech 7:10: don't oppress fatherless, widow, alien or poor
James 2:6: insulting poor, playing up to rich who exploit, take to court

Obviously, not all poverty is due to sin of poor, though clearly some is. How are Christians to react?

Responsibilities of Christians:

1. Don't do any of the things that make for poverty in yourself or others:
 - a. Be diligent in your own work. Encourage diligence in others by word and example. Don't give to others in such a way as to discourage diligence (2 Th 3:10).
 - b. Be thrifty with your wealth. Fight waste & extravagance in home, church, job, govt. Be thrifty even in your benevolence (Lk 10:35).
 - c. Be obedient to God's Word. Encourage others to be obedient also. Work for govt. obedience to God's Word.
 - d. Don't oppress others. Oppose those who do so, whether privately or through business & govt. activities.
2. Be a redemptive force to work against poverty:
 - a. Use your surplus to help others in emergencies (cp Eph 4:28, Acts 4:32-5:4, 2 Cor 8:1-15, Lk 10:30-37).
 - b. Try to do without in order to have more surplus to help others (Mt 25:34-40; 6:19-21; Lk 3:11).
 - c. Encourage your church to devote a Scriptural level of attention to benevolence (note Acts 6, 2 Tim 5).
 - d. Encourage those works which are helping poor get on their feet and reform their own lifestyle.
 - e. Work against societal practices which lead to poverty:
 - (1) advertising => covetousness
 - (2) credit => indebtedness
 - (3) insurance => false security & waste

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