

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF CHRISTIANS TO CONSIDER THE POOR

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“More than one out of four American Protestants give away no money at all—not even a token \$5 per year,” say sociologists Christian Smith, Michael Emerson, and Patricia Snell in a new study on Christian giving, PASSING THE PLATE

In the face of the present day world-wide financial difficulties, the last thing that any of us want to hear is about another financial responsibility. I am sure that all of us feel that we are as burdened down with as many financial burdens as we can bear. Not only are prices going up world-wide, but our incomes are declining. This puts a greater and greater pressure on our personal and our church budgets. “Don’t talk to me about another financial responsibility right now, I’ve got all I can handle,” would be an expected and justifiable response from most of us.

Then there is also the abuse of charity. We see people getting assistance that don’t need it and we see others who make a life-style of living off welfare and the charity of others, it all has a hardening effect on our hearts. I ask you, dear saint, to consider a verse of scripture with me.

Psalms 41:1-3 Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble. The LORD will preserve him, and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth: and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies. The LORD will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness.

FIRST, LET US “CONSIDER THE POOR” TO DETERMINE WHO THEY ARE:

It may seem redundant to ask, who are the poor? Gill says, “the word here used signifies one that is attenuated, weak, and exhausted either of his substance or strength, or both”. We all have seen them and know some who we would classify as poor. Most certainly the poor are all around us, and we should consider them that we might be compassionate and respectful towards them. However, I do not believe it is the masses of poor people in general that the scriptures are speaking about here. It is the poor among the family of God. Yes, we are to consider the masses of poor throughout the whole world, but I believe it is the poor among the family of God that should be our first and primary consideration. Therefore:

A. We should especially “consider the poor” among the family of God.

Paul says, “*If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.*” (1 Timothy 5:8)

Most certainly the apostle is speaking about those of one’s own household, but there is a principle set forth here, it is the priority of responsibility. A man is responsible to God to first provide for his own family, but he is also responsible to “consider the poor” that be of the household of faith. This is what Christ taught in Matthew 25:40, when He said, “*the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*”

James rebukes a disregard of the poor saints when he says:

Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world

rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? (James 2:5).

He gives another rebuke when he says:

If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?" (James 2:15-16). We are to consider compassionately the plight of the poor saints in this world.

B. We should "*consider the poor*" in light of our own poverty apart from God's Sovereign Grace.

"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." (2 Cor.8:9) We all were before God as poor beggars, clothed in filthy garments, covered with putrid sores, with no means of help. As Paul says, *"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."* (Rom. 5:6) Such was our condition before God, but because of His amazing love and mercy towards us, He sent His only begotten Son to die for us that we *"might be rich."* Therefore, *"Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? (1 Cor. 4:7)*

C. We should "*consider the poor*" in light of the Word of God

There are parts of the Word of God that all Christians find to be their favorite and then there are some, like those instructions that deal with our responsibilities

to the poor, we want to ignore or explain them away. James says, *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."* (James 1:27) This is the definition of the very sum and essence of true religion.

Giving to the poor was practiced by Christ and His apostles. When Christ dismissed Judas from the Last Supper and told him, *"That thou doest, do quickly."* We read, *"Some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor."* (John 13:29) This responsibility to care for the poor was so much a part of the church at Jerusalem, that we read, *"Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold."* (Acts 4:34). When Paul and Barnabas were sent by Jerusalem church to evangelize among the Gentiles, they were told, "that we should remember the poor;" (Gal.2:10) A. T. Robertson makes this comment about this verse. [**Only**-*μονον*] One item was emphasized. [**We should remember** (*μν/μονεν /μεν*)] Present active subjunctive, "that we should keep on remembering." Robertson's Word Pictures

Paul's instructions to the elders at Ephesus as he prepared to leave them was, *"I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."* (Acts 20:35) The Apostle, encouraging the saints at Corinth to be faithful in their collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem, reminded them that *"God loveth a cheerful giver."* (II Cor.9:7)

While the necessity of selling our houses and lands is not taught as a

commandment, yet it does show the sense of responsibility and commitment the first century Christians had towards their poor. Maybe it was because of their great generosity that the saints of the churches of Macedonia and Achaia were willing to collect a large contribution for the poor saints at Jerusalem when the famine came (Rom.15:26). At least they proved *"There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches"* (Prov. 13:7).

SECOND, CONSIDER THE POOR IN LIGHT OF GOD'S PROMISES TO GRACIOUS-GIVERS

"The LORD will deliver him in time of trouble. The LORD will preserve him, and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth: and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies. The LORD will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all (comfort, cause to rest) his bed in his sickness. Psalms 41:1-3 Also, With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful; (Psa. 18:25) and He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honour. (Psa. 112:9).

Paul told the saints at Philippi, *"My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."* (Phil. 4:19) This was in view of their great generosity in giving to him. To the church at Corinth, he wrote, *"He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully...And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: (As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever."* (2 Cor.9:6, 89) Paul was teaching those saints and us, that as we are faithful to give to the Lord's work and to the poor saints, so God will be faithful to

bless us to abound in blessings. No one has ever become poor themselves because they gave to the poor. *There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. (Prov.11:24)* These and many other promises that God makes to gracious-givers, should cause us to be merciful and compassionate toward the poor.

THIRDLY, CONSIDER THE POOR IN THE LIGHT OF GOD'S WARNINGS

Psalms 68:5 says, that God is "A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows". Throughout the world, the rich will continue to feast themselves in their wanton life styles while millions die of starvation. They will indulge in the pursuit of the pleasures of their heart, while others must live in constant need of clothing and shelter. They face a most severe judgment by God, *Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you. (James 5:1-6)*

While this warning may not apply to any of you, there is however, a very stern warning given to all in *Proverbs 21:13 Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.*

The Bible is God's revelation to each person into whose hands it comes; and, for the reception of all that it teaches, each man is responsible unto God, though everyone else should reject it. The Judgment Seat of Christ, before whom we all shall give an account, will manifest our obedience or disobedience. May the Lord enable all of us to be gracious and generous givers to the poor that we might be heard by our Heavenly Father in the time of our need!