

Praying for the Poor and Needy

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

- A. The phrase “poor and needy” occurs 17 times in scripture, from the ancient days of Job, to the Law of Moses in Deuteronomy, through the early exilic prophet Ezekiel; most often mentioned in the prayer Psalms
 - 1. The poor are in the first sentence of the first sermon of Jesus at the beginning of His ministry - Matt. 5:3
 - 2. Obviously, God cares about them, and expects His children to care for them as well
- B. There will always be poor persons in our communities - John 12:8
 - 1. Poem of praise the Episcopal Church included in a liturgy for the poor:
“You came to give honor to the least, those forgotten, overlooked and misjudged.
You came to give first place to the last, the left behind, misunderstood and undervalued
You came to give a warm welcome to the lost, the orphaned, abandoned and destitute.
Help us to be your ears to listen to their cries.
Help us to be your voice speaking out love and acceptance.
Help us to be your feet walking beside those in need.
Help us to be your hands to clothe, feed and shelter them.
You came for the least, the lost and last of this world.”
- C. Just as we pray for the sick and afflicted, trusting God to answer the prayer, and then doing what we can for them, in like manner we pray for the poor and needy, trusting that God will hear and answer the prayer, and then we do what we can for them.
 - 1. Even more so, as we have more power to relieve poverty than we have to heal disease.
 - 2. Psalm 34:6; Prov. 22:9, 31:20; Dan. 4:27; Matt. 19:21; Gal. 2:10; James 2:5, 15-16; 1John 3:17-18
- D. Poverty comes from multiple sources: Circumstances, loss of physical or mental capacity, changing economy, personal choice, poor judgment, and laziness, just to mention a few.
 - 1. The Lord has instructions and commands for those who are poor and needy through no fault of their own
 - 2. He has instructions and commands for the wasteful and lazy
 - 3. He has the power and authority to make judgments about how they both came to be poor and needy, and He has the right to reward or punish based on His judgment
 - 4. He has given us the command to help the poor and needy; He has not authorized us anywhere in His word to pass judgment on them
 - 5. He told us to pray for the poor and needy and to relieve their needs

I. WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT THE POOR?

- A. In an editorial published 12/23/1996, Cal Thomas, worried that the government’s capacity to care for the poor is exceeding its limits argues that the church should take up the responsibility. He urges a return to the time “when religious people

were on the front lines in the war on poverty.” “According to the Maryland secretary of state’s office, there are 53,253 families or 185,083 individuals, receiving welfare payments in that state. There are more than 5,000 places of worship in Maryland. So if every place of worship became responsible for just 10 families, or 37 individuals, the welfare rolls in Maryland could be wiped clean. Failure to do so would just be churches rejecting one of their fundamental mandates and opportunities.”

1. This epitomizes the American belief that the church is a welfare organization. This is not taught in the Scriptures.
2. God never instructed the church to eliminate poverty
3. God never instructed the church to support the poor in general, though it does aid members who are needy

II. THE CARE OF THE POOR IS EVERY CHRISTIAN’S RESPONSIBILITY

- A. James 1:27; Gal. 6:9-10; Luke 10:25-37
- B. Compassion means action, not just sympathy - James 2:15-17
- C. Compassion is what separates the sheep from the goats - Matt 25:31-46
- D. God wants a sacrifice of doing good - Heb. 13:16
- E. To love God we must show love for our fellow human beings - 1John 3:17
- F. By compassionate works, we help undo the works of sinful men - Isa. 58:7-11
- G. In caring for others, our comfort and convenience comes second
 1. Matt 5:38-42; Prov. 25:21-22
- H. We must be willing to share God’s blessings - Luke 12:33-34, 3:11; 1Tim. 6:18
- I. God encourages generosity - Luke 6:38; Prov. 28:27, 21:13; Ecc. 11:1-2

III. BUT THIS IS COMMANDED OF INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIANS, NOT THE CHURCH

- A. Jesus was a poor man from a poor family. The common people gladly accepted him as one of their own - Mark 12:37
 1. Jesus’ purpose was to teach the truth - John 18:37
 2. His service to the poor was to teach the Gospel - Luke 4:18, 7:22
 3. When people followed him because he feed the 5,000, Jesus turned them away, because that was not His purpose - John 6:26-27
 4. Jesus came into a world dominated by an oppressive government, filled with slavery, poverty was wide spread through much of the population; yet, He did not attempt to change the people’s political, social, or economic status.
- B. As with Christ, the church’s purpose is in the spread of the gospel - 1Tim. 3:15
 2. Congregations, at times, did give aid to needy members, but it is not the church’s scriptural primary purpose. The church’s benevolence was never given, nor ever authorized to be given to the world in general
 3. “Go to the American Lung Association with a toe problem and ask for help. What would happen? Chances are good that those folks would be unable to assist you. Their area of expertise begins at the top of your chest and ends about the middle of your stomach. They aren’t the American Toe Association. They do lungs, and anything associated with your lungs and breathing.”

“Does this mean they aren’t compassionate? If you are turned away and told to have your toe looked at elsewhere does that mean the American Lung Association does

not care? Is the American Lung Association “anti”toes, or horror of horrors, actually guilty of hating toes? No, they are not. When the ALA tells you to go elsewhere for toe care, it simply means they have a mission, a focused objective, and they have to “stay on target.” They do lungs, period. If they start scattering themselves all over everywhere doing everything for everyone, who will take care of lung and breathing problems?”
(Mark Roberts)

4. The church’s focus is teaching God’s word - Eph. 4:11-16
 5. Everything the church does revolves around the Gospel. It is not an employment agency, recreation center, political action committee, or welfare aid society.
 6. The world’s deepest need, its greatest poverty, is sin. The only cure for this is the Gospel. The local church must not set aside the saving of souls in order to wait on tables. That is our job.
- C. So pray as the Psalmist prayed for the poor and needy - Psalm 82:4, 72:13
D. Then get busy intervening for them as Solomon instructed - Prov. 31:8-9
E. And then help them as Jesus commanded - Acts 20:35; 2Cor. 8:9, 9:9