

A BIBLE STUDY ON POVERTY

The key to salvation is our treasure in heaven (not earth) through eliminating our abundant possessions (Lk 12:15) and doing restitution if we are rich, the rich being those having abundance and luxury (Js 5:33). We need to share our abundance with those in need as a matter of equality and with the goal of equality (2 Cor 8:14, Js 14). How much should we have? Sufficient bread (Mt 6:11, Lk 11:3), and the necessities of clothing and food (Lk 12:15) are sufficient, adequate and enough (1 Tim 6:8). The standard of inheritance of God's promise to Abraham of family land and shelter passed on by the jubilee law seems a good one (Lev 25), a right directly proclaimed as liberty by Jesus (Lev 25:10, Is 61:1, Lk 4:18-19). We are very anxious about all this and Jesus knows it (Lk 12, Mt 6). God values us more than the birds!

Questions'

1. How much is enough? (See 1 Timothy 6:16)

2. Does the Bible teach equality (see 2 Cor 8:9-15)?

3. Does the Jubilee mean every family should own their own means of livelihood? (see Lev 25)

New Testament Notes on ptoc (poor, poverty) - The gospel has unique relevance for the poor (Mt 11:5, Lk 4:18) since it is good news of a levelling of wealth (Mt 19:21, Lk 19:8) through redistribution and sharing of abundance toward equality (2 Cor 8: 2-5, cf. Jn 13: 29). Equal treatment is part of loving your neighbor, the royal law (Js 2: 2-9).

Concern for the poor can transcend theological debate (Gal 2:10), can fill the banquet table with the poor (Lk 24:13, 21) who have the Kingdom of Heaven (Lk 6:20, Mt 5:3). The poor widow's offering amounted to everything (Mk 12:42) while the costliness of the offering for Jesus gives us reality about the poor being with us until the end of time (Mt 26:11 - compare Dt 15:4-5,11) when the kingdom fully comes.

Poverty was extreme, for beggars who were found maimed, lame and blind (Lk 14:13, 21; Rev 3:17). Beggars even found food which fell off a rich man's table (Lazarus - Lk 16: 20, 22). There are some verses using poor/poverty which relate material and spiritual poverty/riches (2 Cor 6:10, 8:9, Rev 2:9; compare Rev 3:17, Mt 5:3).

BIBLE STUDY ON THE POOREST

It is good to look at the Scriptural teachings about the poor in the Old Testament (ebyon). The poor were a special charge of God who remembered them, pitied and comforted them and cared for them.

There were many laws in the Israelite law (Lev 19: 23; Deut 14-15, 25) which included warning to oppressors of the poor (Ex 23:3, Lev 19:15). The prophets were strong with these oppressors (Is 1:23, Ez 22:7, Mi 2:2, Mai 2:5) even to the point of the death penalty (Ez 18:10-13--see below). The Bible also teaches that God seeks social justice through legislation (Dr 10:17-18, 2 Sam 22:28, Is 25:4, Am 2:6, etc.).

Read Exodus 23:1-8. What does poor in their lawsuit mean (v.3 6)? Where is our gate (place of power)?

Read 5:10-15. Are we in an evil time?

Read Psalm 92:1-7. Does the Lord see today's evildoers (v.4, 7)? Can we ask the God of vengeance to render just deserts (v. 1-2)?

The poor were a special charge of God. The Lord would not forget them (Ps 9:12; 10:12; etc.) Yahweh pities and comforts them (Ps 34:6; Isa 49:13; etc. God cares for them (Job 5:15; Ps 107:41, 132.:15; Jer 20:13; etc.) ... The SOJOURNER, was to likewise protected. ("Poor" in Dictionary of the Bible, vol 3, p. 843)

In Ezk 18:12, the oppression of the poor and needy is listed among the abominable things of a violent son which are punishable by death. This list also includes robbery (cf Lev 19:13), refusing to restore the garment taken in pledge (Ex. 22:25f; Dt 24:10-13, 17), lending at interest, and taking increase (cf Ezk 22:12; Ex. 22:24; Dt 23:20f; Lev. 25:36f). According to the sermon against the ruling classes in 22:25-30, the landed gentry in Judah committed extortion, robbery, oppression of the poor and needy. (THEOLOGICAL DICTIONARY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, Vol 1, 1970, p. 33)

A BIBLE STUDY ON ABUNDANCE

We tend to lift up the opposites such as the rich and the poor, abundance and want. If we know that God does not want us poor and needy, then we are "off the hook" if we are affluent! But there is another category in the scriptures which is called enough (1 Tim 6:8, Js 2:14-16), sufficient (Mt 6:11 - not daily), and necessary (Ac 14:5, 16:33). The Bible appears to have three categories - rich, poor and enough. In this day of world hunger and American affluence, Christians need to take a long, hard look at their rich lifestyles.

Questions:

1. Christians are rich in everything - faith, speech, knowledge and zeal (2 Cor 8:7). Can we therefore be free to work for equality (8:13-14)?

2. By using 2 Corinthians, chapters 8 and 9 (especially 9:7) as a stewardship theme to raise church budget funds, have we refused to struggle with the message about abundance? (see note)

3. Can those who are rich and with more than they need (abundance) be saved? (see Lk 6:24, Mt 6:24, 19:21-24, 27:57)

NT Note on perisseia (abundance)- Abundance or surplus is related to food (Mk 8: 8, Lk 15:17, Ph 4:12), possessions (Mt 25:1-13, Mk 12:15), or riches (2 Cor 8:2, Mk 12: 44). Also we abound in love (Ph 1:9, 1 Th 4:10, 1 Th 3:12), of justice (2 Cor 3:9, Mt 5:20), of thanksgiving (2 Cor 9:12, Col 2:7, 2 Cor 4:15), of joy (2 Cor 8:2), of grace (Ro 5:15f) toward personal abounding 1 Cor 14:1-19, 1 Th 4:18) in the work of the Lord (1 Cor 15:58) in a sanctifying way (Ph 1:9, Ep 1:8) of knowledge, intelligence, wisdom and perception of the mysteries of Christ for God's glory (Ro 3:7) and pleasure (1 Th 4:1).

The most important passage on surplus of possessions is 2 Cor 8-9 where Paul uses the word ten times (8:2a,2b, 7a, 7b, 14a, 14b, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100). Jerusalem was in great need (Ac 11:29) and now is the time to abound in the work of giving as able (8:12). The Corinthians should give not to burden themselves and to make life easy for them but as a matter of equality of supply and need. Times could reverse (8:13-14).

A BIBLE STUDY ON FOOD SUFFICIENCY

In Biblical times most households were self-supporting in their food supply (see note). In Jerusalem this was not possible so where grain could be bought (2 Kgs. 7:1) but probably little bread (Jer 37:21). Cargill-like merchants were under judgment and their cargo including cinnamon, spice, wine, oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep were no longer bought (Rev 18:11-13). From Biblical teaching we can infer that food self-sufficiency is preferred. Give us this day our necessary bread (Mt 6:11, Lk 11:3) is a better translation than "daily" bread (see note). Yet we shall not live by bread alone (Mt 4:4) but also by the bread of life (Jn 6:35), our spiritual food (Jn 6:27, 55) - Jesus.

Questions:

1. Does the Bible teach food self-sufficiency? Does the industrial revolution make such teaching irrelevant?

2. Study Matthew 6:11/Luke 11:3. Various interpretations of the word *epiousios* are necessary, daily, for the morrow and for the future. Why do you think "daily" has been the most popular? (see note)

3. Read John chapter 6. Is it significant that Jesus relates communion to bread and wine? Does this make food and hunger unimportant?

In Old Testament times as a rule every household provided food for its own wants. . . . every tiller of the soil had also some sheep and goats, and most had a few oxen (Neh 10:35-37) in general even in New Testament times most households were self-supporting." "Food" in THE INTERNATIONAL STANDARD BIBLE ENCYCLOPEDIA, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Editor, 1982.

***epiousios* - "In the NT it occurs only in the Lord's Prayer in Mt. 6:11, Lk 11:3 it is not an indication of time but of measure *epiousios* defines the amount of bread. ... it expresses confidence that God will give us as we have need its force is adequately brought out in the rendering: 'The bread which we need, give us to-day (day by day). Kittel's THEOLOGICAL DICTIONARY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT (TWNT) Vol II, p. 590-599.**

A Bible Study on the Household and the Economy

In Biblical times the household included servants or slaves - Mt 13:27, Ac 10:7. Generally, the household was agriculturally oriented (Is 28:24-29) as was the case in the world until 100 - 150 years ago. The house was the center of work so one can see how the word economy (Laws of the household) came from the house. In recent years the house has become more a consuming group than producing, but this may change.

Questions

1. Farming was common to the household economy (Read Is 28:24-29) . Should we produce more of our own food today?

2. Do you consider yourself an economist? Why not? How has the age of capitalism affected the meaning of the word, economist? (See note) Read Ephesians.

3. The household was an important place for meeting. Should the church organize around the household more? Read Acts 2:46-47 and 5:40-42 (See note).

Notes on oikos (house) - "Primitive Christianity structured the congregations in families, groups and houses. The house was both a fellowship and a place of meeting (Ph 2, Acts 2:46, 5:42). ... The house and family are the smallest natural groups in the total structure of the congregation." (Kittel's THEOLOGICAL WORDBOOK OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, Vol 5, p 130)
oikos (law of the household) - The King James version translated the world steward/stewardship. Modern translators use manager/ management/plan/office. To make the word most relevant it should be translated economy/ economist/ economic plan when used comprehensively. ... It is in Ephesians where the word relates most comprehensively to authorities and God's purpose (chapter one). Paul is an economist and minister (an economic minister - Eph 3:9, Col 1:25) called to preach the economic plan of God (3:2, 7) who created all things (3:9) and raised Christ above all rule and authority and power and dominion. God's economic plan will unite all things in heaven and on earth (2:10). Paul later spells out the practicalities of the economy for the Ephesians (4:1-6).