

INEQUALITY

Written by Calvin Fox

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The word "poor" is commonly defined as those who are literally "poor". This is not the case. Many who are poor by American standards are not necessarily "bad off". Many of them are far from languishing in weakness and being forlorn- literally, like a leaf dried up and ready to fall. Here is a recent photo essay with poignant photos of slum-dwellers. Many of these "poor" people are proud, strong, resilient, even happy. Perhaps more so than many rich Americans. Others, of course, do fit the description of v.1. I am just suggesting caution and a far more careful, judicious use of the catch-all label, "The Poor"! But let us not define or rationalize away the plight of the truly Poor. Let us, indeed, "consider" what the Bible says about them.

Consider Paul's own example: *"... remember the poor. I [have] made every effort to do [so]* And there is Paul's advice to rich people
17 As for the rich in this present age, charge them 6 ...to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share [with the poor]
And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need,(1 Tim 6:18
, Titus 3 3:14)

Then there is always *1John 3:17-18, if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?*
Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed.
and
James 1:27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction
and
2:14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? 17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

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Scripture is clear! Christians are to consider the cause, and find solutions, for Poverty. We are to get involved with people who are poor, not just give money, but become truly, personally involved.

BUT-

The text, "...

Christ: although He was rich ... became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich" is misused. (2 Cor 8:9). Obviously, the poverty of Jesus refers to his leaving Glory to become a human on earth. Being rich, in the verse, is the opposite of being poor.. If the poverty is literally lack of the necessities of life, the opposite riches is literal wealth.

But the immediate text is about Salvation.

Salvation is not about wealth.

Jesus left Glory so we could go there and be spiritually rich.

However, this truth is used by Paul in the larger context of 2 Cor 8 and 9 as an example to those of us who have money to give some of it to those who do not.

Both what Jesus did for us and what we are to do for others, based on his example, is to demonstrate Grace

In those two chapters, Paul is not talking about Government programs to take wealth from citizens who have it and give it to citizens who do not. He is talking about Christians voluntarily giving according to their means to the poor (vs 11-12).

Nor is Paul advocating the pursuit of economic equality.

Involuntary redistribution and economic equality for all are not Biblical Principles!

Rather, Paul is advocating generous giving based on the principal of equity and reciprocity.

Notice that the help to be given is money, food, clothing and visitation. Paul, in this case, was raising a collection of money from one church to be given to another, many miles away.

No relocation was involved.

1 Cor 8:13 It is not that there may be relief for others and hardship for you, Paul is not advocating that the rich and poor switch places!

but he does advocate a kind of

equality

- (*Grk: isotes*).

This is a moral concept that Evangelicals need to study.

14 at the present time your surplus is [available] for their need, so that their abundance may also become [available] for your need, that there may be equality

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Compare what is said of Jesus: *Phil 2:5 Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus, 6 who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage. 7 Instead He emptied Himself by assuming the form of a slave ...*

God the Father and God the Son were equal in Nature, but Jesus did not consider equality with God, in matters of their respective roles, something to be grasped - the Son accepted subordination to the Father's authority ("Thy will be done, not mine") Masters are to treat their slaves with equality of compassion, as Brothers and Sisters in Christ (Col 4:1).

We all are to extend to others compassion equal to that which we want for ourselves (The Golden Rule) That is not an argument against maintaining unequal social and legal status. The church was full of social and economic inequality and that was not challenged in the New Testament.

Paul simply was saying, in this matter of care for the Poor. Christians are to give freely and generously of their surplus to others in need and the latter, in turn, should reciprocate in like manner, as need arises. This is the "equality"- the equality of compassion and care- Paul advocated.

He did not mandate legal or social equality, nor equality of status, power or authority.

There is much more about Poverty on this website in Essays under the Category of Re/formation Institute