

## **NEW: THE BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF POVERTY, OF “THE POOR”**

Written by Calvin Fox

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Who the Poor are and what Poverty is commonly decided by Federal standards, determining eligibility for various Government welfare programs. Bible believing Christians, use the Bible to define the Poor and Poverty, its causes and cures.

By

the

most common Biblical definition of Poverty, people are correctly called "poor" if they once had property and means, but have lost their livelihood or are no longer able to work and maintain their property. The truly Poor are those who,

due to no fault of their own

, can't pay their bills because of plant closings, fire, accident, death in the family, debilitating illness, enormous medical bills, etc. and, of course, natural disasters like tornadoes. In Sum: the Biblical definition of Poverty is Destitution due to no fault of one's own.

The truly Poor are the Destitute.

### **THE MAIN REASON FOR CHRONIC, DEEP-ROOTED, SEEMINGLY INTERMINABLE POVERTY [DESTITUTION] IS OPPRESSION**

Evangelicals commonly think that personal lifestyle and behavior is the main reason for poverty; but, acknowledging that there is truth to that for some people (especially in the Book of Proverbs), the Bible teaches that the main reason for chronic poverty or destitution is Oppression

Oppression is primarily the work of invading enemy armies or the behavior of rich and powerful people. The latter exploit those who can no longer work their land- (widows, fatherless children) and the sick or disabled or farmers who have had poor crops due to disasters of some kind and must borrow to keep going. Loans lead to indentured servant hood and forfeiture of the family farm. In some cases, land is simply stolen by the powerful. All of this is injustice. It violates the law of God and the rights of the Poor. In the Bible, such oppression (which is often systemic) is the primary cause of chronic Poverty . Not all who are called Poor are oppressed, but the oppressed are truly poor.

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### **Examples of Oppression**

Oppression is exploitation, defrauding, cheating, and stealing.

Oppression can be suffering loss or violence at the hands of “powerful interests” using corrupt courts or bad laws.

The typical victims of such oppression, in Scripture, are workers who have very low incomes and are weak with little or no economic, social or political power

Think of the Money Lender abruptly taking the farm from the widow and her children after the husband is killed in an accident. Think of the King taking house or land of a subject to make room for an addition to his palace or a Corporation taking housing or land by eminent domain for a parking lot. Think of the Wealthy Landowner claiming neighboring land to improve his view of the ocean or think of people who lose their houses to unscrupulous or dishonest money lenders because a catastrophe has taken away their income and they are unable to pay off debts or are forced off their property by a developer taking the land for commercial development with the support of Government. Many examples exist as oppression is very common.

People dealing with mental, emotional or physical “disease” and are destitute for these reasons are oppressed if and when treatment and support is denied to them.

Many Bible texts tell us that God is very concerned for victims of oppression. He wants them to have justice. God is not on the side of the poor as such. God is on the side of Justice. All people have a right to work, to engage in the economic processes. They have the right to enjoy the fruit from their labor, to make a profit, to have private property and to own land. God upholds all these rights. To deny any of them to anyone is injustice and God is against any person, group, business or laws that do the denying.

### **THE PRIMARY CAUSE OF OPPRESSION: IDOLATRY**

Oppression is rooted in idolatry. The Bible makes it clear that the primary cause of oppression is not greed, but idolatry. As people reject God & His Law to follow idols, they substitute the ungodly values and behavior dictated by those idols.

Major contemporary Idols in America include

- **Statism is faith in the concentration of economic and social controls and planning in the hands of a highly centralized government**

- Scientism is an exaggerated trust in the efficacy of the methods of natural [science](#) applied to all areas of investigation (as in philosophy, the social [sciences](#), and the humanities)

- Technism is the conviction that Technique and Technology are the answer to everything

- Economism is [reduction](#) of all [social facts](#) to [economic](#) dimensions. Especially an [ideology](#), in which [supply and demand](#) (“The Free Market”) are the only important factors in decisions, ignoring all other factors

Worship of any of these Idols historically leads to the belief that ends justify means and to the objectification and oppression of persons and the exploitation of Nature. Those who serve these Idols use them to gain and exercise power for themselves. They are deceived. Idols end up controlling those who worship them.

This leads idol worshipers to exploit and oppress the weak and powerless. This is not to say that all people who are rich and powerful do this! There are many rich and powerful people who are also both moral and compassionate and use their wealth and power to accomplish much

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good in the world. Nevertheless, Idolatry leads to oppression and must be confronted.

### **Long range Biblical Solution for Poverty involves tearing down the Idols by the preaching of the Gospel and the Removal of Oppression**

Poverty which is caused by oppression will not be solved by anything less than removal of that oppression. The oppressive behavior mentioned in Scripture is illegal in America. Justice [an end to oppression] must be secured primarily through the Courts . Such action goes to the root of the problem. If the oppression is systemic and institutionalized, those systems and institutions must be confronted by the Law. Such opposition calls for brave action, even resistance, from individuals, churches and the community at large.

### **SPECIFIC POSITIVE STEPS THE BIBLE GIVES TO CARE FOR THE DESTITUTE**

**1. Family** According to the Bible, truly destitute and very poor people are to be taken in and supported by their kin, their extended family [caring for its needy members is the family's God-given responsibility]

**2. Church** As well as preaching the Gospel), the Church must teach its members the Biblical Principles for living, which includes giving compassionate, generous and personal direct care to those in need.

**3. Business** In the Bible, the Destitute had a right to glean in the fields of others. Today, that means Businesses giving the Poor access to their products and services.

**4. Civic Community** The Destitute have a right to share in the collective wealth (charity) of the entire local community

To deny the truly poor any of the above rights is injustice. Bible-believing Christians should be

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in the forefront of those who advocate Justice for all based on Biblical Principles.

Families and churches and private relief agencies throughout the country are helping people with direct care. Charitable giving, in the amounts of millions of dollars, is being given to help the Poor. Many Businesses are also very generous and charitable. The amount and type of aid necessary from the Federal Government is always debatable, but even here, the Biblical principles should be followed. These principles obviously are most workable on a small scale in fairly small towns and cities where people know each other. How to implement them in mega-cities and in huge national disasters is another matter. Caring for the Poor should be as local and as grass roots as possible, working first with resident families and local businesses and then with local communities, regions and States. The objective is to enable the Destitute to chart their own course and be responsible for their own future. This is known as the Principle of Subsidiarity.

### **5. State and Federal Government**

The principle of Subsidiary advocates that government should undertake only those initiatives which exceed the capacity of individuals or private groups acting independently. The principle is based upon the autonomy and dignity of the human individual, the human person. In no way is the Civil Government to assume the duties of the Family, Church, Business or local community. Indisputably, the Biblical role of government, whatever else it may do, is to maintain law and order and, particularly, prevent waste and corruption in the care of the Destitute, the truly Poor.