

New: ECONOMIC EQUALITY- IS IT TAUGHT IN THE BIBLE?

Written by Calvin Fox

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Does the Bible teach economic equality? or Government redistribution of wealth to create economic equality?

A Major NT Text on this subject is 2 Cor 8-9

Paul says elsewhere "... **remember the poor**. I [have] made every effort to do [so]. Paul's advice to rich people: **As for the rich in this present age, charge them ...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 3:14)**

Then there is always **1 John 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** . Scripture is clear!

Christians are to consider and help the Poor. And the Biblical way to do that is more than writing a check. To give aid to the poor involves becoming personally involved with them. That is true "compassion". This word means "to suffer with". A classic example of that is the "Good Samaritan". Carefully re-read Luke 10: 29-37

The most important text about economic equality is "2 Cor 8-9

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia [the reference is a collection of money in the Corinthian church to be given to the church in Jerusalem where Believers were in dire straits due primarily to severe famine.] See 1 Cor 16:1-3

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This was voluntary, proportional and regular giving, it was not the Tithe (a third of which also went to care for the Poor).

2 Although they [the churches of Macedonia] themselves were in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. 3 [How did they manage?]...they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, 4 begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints-- 5 ... they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

6 Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. 7 ... see that you excel in this act of grace 9 [Jesus was our model, our example] For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. 10 ... this matter [of giving money to poor Believers in Jerusalem] benefits you, 11 So now finish doing it ... 12 ...[Giving] is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.

Now comes the reciprocal factor in Christian giving. Those who gave to the poor did not lose their money. That would be unfair. When the Poor who received the charity get back on their feet, they return the favor and give back to those who had given to them. This would be fair or equitable.

13 For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but ... a matter of fairness. The Greek word used here and in v.14 can be translated as equity, fairness. 14 your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness.

[The Greek word here can be translated as "equality"- but not economic equality. In this context the word means fairness, not equality. Neither giving nor loving sacrificially comes naturally. Christian giving to the Poor [actually, all tithing and giving] begins with acknowledging God to be the true owner and provider of any wealth we may have. He is the prime giver of all good things (James|1: 17) What we have to give to others comes from God in the first place. He supplies all our need.

Deut 8 Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have

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gotten me this wealth.' 18 You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth ... To

1 Chron 29:11 Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. 12 Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all

1 Chron 29:14 [Moses said] "who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? [read the entire chapter] For all things come from you, and of your own have we given... 16 O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have comes from your hand and is all your own.

1 Sam 27 The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts.

As we need grace (God's help) to love others, so we need grace to give generously to others (mentioned 4x in this Text) The ability to sacrifice and give money away to the Poor is enabled by the generous grace of God.

Paul is not talking about Government programs to take wealth from citizens who have it and give it to citizens who do not. Paul 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. [The giving was done by more than 8 churches over a period of 10 years! I am impressed that a very busy Evangelist, Missionary and church planter was so seriously involved in raising funds for the Poor!

2 Cor 8:13 It is not that there may be relief for others and hardship for you,

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Paul is not advocating that the rich and poor switch places! but he does advocate a kind of equality- (Grk: *isotes*). 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.

Yes, all Believers are one spiritually one in Christ; but Paul is not arguing for equality of social and legal status. The church was full of social and economic inequality. 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 down the road. This reciprocity is what he means by "equality"- the equality and fairness of mutual compassion and care. "You have need, I have resources. I will share them with you. Later, when I am in need and you have resources, I expect you to give to me."

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