

Topics in Practical Theology – Lesson 7 – The Poor

Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School

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Discussion Question:

1. How do you define rich and poor?

Review:

1. Overview and Spirit-filled life: A walk in the Spirit is a moment by moment decision to recognize, repent, and confess sin; to yield our will to God's word; and to allow the word to richly dwell in us.
2. Spiritual Warfare: The believer is in a war – a war for our minds. We are being attacked by the devil, his world system, and the flesh. Yet, God has given us everything we need to be victorious in the battle: the word and the indwelling Holy Spirit.
3. Worship: Worship is a continual action of ascribing worth to God as we meditate on His majesty, placing the worship of Him before everything, and worshiping Him with our entire being with correct understanding from and in a manner consistent with His word.
4. God's Will and Decision Making: The decision making process is 1) obedience to God's word in moral decisions, 2) freedom to make spiritually expedient non-moral decisions with the responsibility to use wisdom, and 3) humble submission to God's sovereign.
5. Spiritual Gifts: Every believer has been given at least one spiritual gift. These gifts are different from talents. Spiritual gifts are given for the purpose of building the body of Christ as they are used to serve other believers within the body.
6. Body Life: The people at VBC are members of my family. I have responsibilities toward my physical family; I also have responsibilities toward my church family.

The Poor

The subject of the rich and poor is one great contention among those who crave political debate. Although this subject may divide among political lines it should not divide believers. The Scriptures provide clear teaching on believer's responsibility toward the poor. However, before we begin looking at these Scriptures we need to understand who are "the poor".

^{3b}Behold, on the day of your fast you find {your} desire, And drive hard all your workers.⁴Behold, you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a wicked fist. You do not fast like {you do} today to make your voice heard on high. ⁵Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it for bowing one's head like a reed And for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed? Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the LORD? ⁶Is this not the fast which I choose, To loosen the bonds of wickedness, To undo the bands of the yoke, And to let the oppressed go free And break every yoke? ⁷**Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry And bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the naked, to cover him;** And not to hide yourself from your own flesh? ⁸Then your light will break out like the dawn, And your recovery will speedily spring forth; And your righteousness will go before you; The glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Isa 58:3b-8

⁹He who is generous will be blessed, For he gives some of his **food** to the poor. Prov 22:9

²⁴"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. ²⁵"For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, {as to} what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, {as to} what you will put on. **Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?** ²⁶"Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and {yet} your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? ²⁷"And who of you by being worried can add a {single} hour to his life? ²⁸"And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, ²⁹yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. ³⁰"But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is {alive} today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, {will He} not much more {clothe} you? You of little faith! ³¹"Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' ³²"For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ³⁴"So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Matt 6:24-34

⁶But godliness {actually} is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. ⁷For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. ⁸**If we have food and covering**, with these we shall be content. 1 Tim 6:8

Attitude toward money

Now that we have determined that we all are “rich” according to Biblical standards, what should our attitude toward money be? One of our attitudes should be that we are “free from the love of money”. In fact this is a character quality that is true of mature (or maturing) believers.

Maturing believers understand the snare of riches.

⁹But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. 1 Tim 6:9-10

²⁸He who trusts in his riches will fall, But the righteous will flourish like the *green* leaf. Prov 11:28

Maturing believers have their priorities straight.

²⁴"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. Matt 6:24

Maturing believers understand that they own nothing – they are stewards.

¹The earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains, The world, and those who dwell in it. Psa 24:1

Maturing believers are content with what they have.

⁵*Make sure* that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,” ⁶so that we confidently say, “THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?” Heb 13:5-6

⁶But godliness *actually* is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. ⁷For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. ⁸If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. 1 Tim 6:6-8

¹¹Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. ¹²I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. ¹³I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. Phil 4:11-13

Maturing believers work hard to have extra to share with those in need.

²⁸He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have {something} to share with one who has need. Eph 4:28

Maturing believers are generous and ready to share.

¹⁷Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. ¹⁸*Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, ¹⁹storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed. 1 Tim 6:17-19

Both the Old and New Testaments declare that there will always be poor.

¹¹"For the poor will never cease {to be} in the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.' Deut 15:11

⁷Therefore Jesus said, "Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial. ⁸"For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me." John 12:7-8

The Reasons for Poverty

1. Laziness

⁹How long will you lie down, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? ¹⁰"A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest." ¹¹Your poverty will come in like a vagabond And your need like an armed man. Prov 6:9-11

⁹Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, But the hand of the diligent makes rich. Prov 10:4

2. Rash Financial Decisions

²⁸"For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? ²⁹"Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, ³⁰saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Luke 14:28-30

3. Squander on Pleasure

¹³"And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. ¹⁴"Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. Luke 14:13-14

4. Inattention

²³Know well the condition of your flocks, {And} pay attention to your herds; ²⁴For riches are not forever, Nor does a crown {endure} to all generations. Prov 27:23-24

5. Unexpected Life Situations

⁶Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the LORD had visited His people in giving them food. Ruth 1:6

6. Commitment to Ministry

²³And Jesus, looking around, *said to His disciples, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!" ²⁴The disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus *answered again and *said to them, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁶They were even more astonished and said to Him, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷Looking at them, Jesus *said, "With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God." ²⁸Peter began to say to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You." Mark 10:23-28

Attitude toward the poor

The Lord makes the rich and the poor

²The rich and the poor have a common bond, The LORD is the maker of them all. Prov 22:2

⁷"The LORD makes poor and rich; He brings low, He also exalts. 1 Sam 2:7

Do not harden heart nor close hand against

⁷"If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; ⁸but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need {in} whatever he lacks. ⁹"Beware that there is no base thought in your heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,' and your eye is hostile toward your poor brother, and you give him nothing; then he may cry to the LORD against you, and it will be a sin in you. ¹⁰"You shall generously give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all your undertakings. Deut 15:7-10

Graciousness to honors the Lord

³¹He who oppresses the poor taunts his Maker, But he who is gracious to the needy honors Him. Prov 14:31

¹⁷One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, And He will repay him for his good deed. Prov 19:17

Do not show partiality

¹My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with {an attitude of} personal favoritism. ²For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, ³and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," ⁴have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? ⁵Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world {to be} rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? ⁶But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? ⁷Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? ⁸If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well. ⁹But if you show partiality, you are committing sin {and} are convicted by the law as transgressors. James 2:1-9

Remember the poor

¹⁰{They} only {asked} us to remember the poor--the very thing I also was eager to do. Gal 2:7-10

Old Testament method of helping the poor

The Old Testament form of government for Israel was a theocracy – God Himself was the ruler of Israel. As the ruler over Israel He instituted a “welfare” system that helped care for the less fortunate of Jewish society. However, even in this welfare system the poor were required to do work to obtain aid. Even so, there were those who could not live on this charity and there was a need for individual, personal intervention of those who had more than basic needs.

⁹Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. ¹⁰Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God. Lev 19:9-10

¹⁹When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. ²⁰When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. ²¹When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not go over it again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. Deut 24:19-21

⁷If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; ⁸but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need {in} whatever he lacks. Deut 15:7-8

In our country, at this time, there are programs set up to care for the basic needs of those who cannot provide for themselves – even if they choose to live an irresponsible lifestyle. On a personal level believers are obligated to help those in need.

¹⁶We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

¹⁷But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? ¹⁸Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. 1 John 3:16-18

¹⁴What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for {their} body, what use is that?

¹⁷Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, {being} by itself. James 2:14-17

Who should we help?

⁶The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches {him.} ⁷Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. ⁸For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. ⁹Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. ¹⁰So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. Gal 6:6-10

²⁶And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" ²⁷And he answered, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." ²⁸And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE." ²⁹But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. ³¹And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³²Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, ³⁴and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on {them;} and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.' ³⁶Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' {hands?}" ³⁷And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same." Luke 10:29-37

To what extent should we help those in need?

⁴²"Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. Mat 5:42

¹⁰For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. ¹¹For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. ¹²Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. ¹³But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good. 2 Thess 3:10-13

If a person who is poor is willing to work and yet is lacking the basic necessities of life we have a responsibility to assist him. But if a person who is poor is unwilling to work and is lacking the basic necessities of life we have no responsibility to assist them. Dale Whitehead in sermon on 2 Thess 3

Conclusion

Believers are personally obligated be prepared to help those who come across their path in need. The fact that the government provides for those in need does not negate our responsibility. However, we are limited by the obligation to not perpetuate an irresponsible lifestyle.