

HOW SHOULD WE HANDLE OUR WEALTH? JUSTICE NOT CHARITY

Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but those who are kind to the needy honor him.

PROVERBS 14:31

Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD.

PROVERBS 19:17

The entire Bible tells us that God cares for the poor in a special way. The poor have God's ear, God's concern, God on their side. God's care for the poor is so intense, his identification with them so strong, that any of us who oppresses the poor insults not only them, but also God himself! "Those who oppress the poor insult their *maker*."

Thus we are called not only to compassionate "seeing" of the poor but also to frank acceptance of responsibility for them. We may not let them struggle on their own. We must not "provoke" the poor by flaunting fancy possessions. As Isaiah 32 says, we must not "ruin the poor with lying words" – claiming, for example, that welfare mothers all drive new Cadillacs and use their food stamps to buy steaks. Instead, we ought to defend the poor from attack, even from verbal attack. And, as Ernest Campbell somewhere says, in our politics we ought to fight "the mood that would see more done for those who have enough already and less for those who lack."

We have to take a stand with those who "have not." For, once again, God watches closely, sensitively, personally, how we act in this. "God sends us the poor as *his* receivers," says the reformer John Calvin. "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord," says the Bible.

The Bible doesn't talk first about charity for the poor. It doesn't assume that we ought to keep all the power. There is no Biblical warrant for patronizing poor people.

Rather, the Bible talks first about justice, about the rights of the poor, about the fact that the poor have a moral claim on us. "The righteous know the rights of the poor; the wicked have no such understanding" (Proverbs 29:7)

Talk about justice, rights, and claims is the hardest talk of all. That is, after all, the kind of talk that touches off revolution --- or, if we act before it's too late, godly economic reformation.

O Lord, give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them

From *Assurances of the Heart* by Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.

PRAYER (author unknown)

*You asked for my hands
That you might use them for your purpose.
I gave them for a moment
Then withdrew them for the work was hard.*

*You asked for my mouth
To speak out against injustice.
I gave you a whisper that I might not be accused.*

*You asked for my eyes
To see the pain of poverty.
I closed them for I did not want to see.*

*You asked for my life
That you might work through me.
I gave a small part that I might not get 'too involved'.*

*Lord, forgive me for my calculated efforts to serve you
Only when it is convenient for me to do so,
Only in those places where it is safe to do so,
And only with those who make it easy to do so.*



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