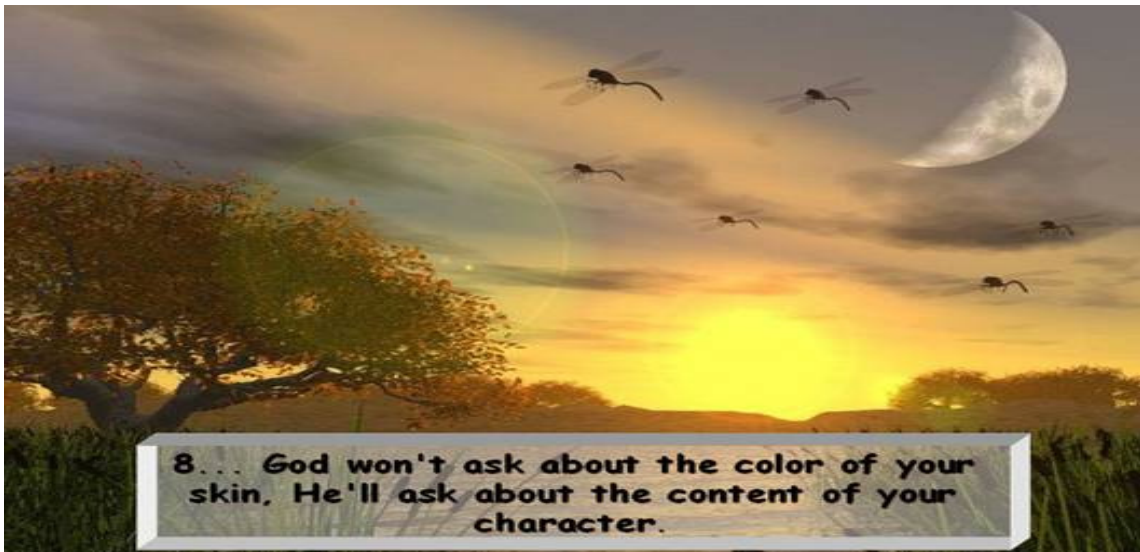


Caring for the Needy



Graham F. Watts, Sr.

VISION: To hear the midnight cry, "The bridegroom comes, go out to meet Him" (Matthew 25:6) and become like Him when I see Him as He is (1 John 3:2).

MISSION: Purify myself even as Christ is pure (1 John 3:3) to be glad, to rejoice, give honor to Christ and be ready for the marriage of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7).

VALUES: Follow the Lamb wherever He goes (Revelation 14:4), be without fault before God (Revelation 14:5), be perfect even as my Father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:48), wear the Lamb's fine, clean and white linen (Revelation 19:8) do righteously (1 John 3:10) and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8).

OVERALL AIM: Studies presented here unveil Bible knowledge to inquiring minds to prompt the following inquiries: "Are our feet on the rock of ages? Are we one with Christ as He is one with the Father" (John 10:30 in Evangelism, {Ev} 199.1)? Am I crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20)?

PURPOSE/REASON FOR/WHY

This study aims to influence churches to adopt beneficent policies, practices and procedures.

OBJECTIVE/WHAT WE WANT TO ACCOMPLISH

To help readers identify their responsibility to *Care for the Lord's Poor*.

BACKGROUND CONTEXT

In the wake of near collapse of the world's financial markets serious consequences are being felt both up and down stream in our predominantly service economy. These times should remind us of Jesus' statement: "The poor shall always be among you" (Deuteronomy 15:11, Matthew 26:11; Mark 14:7 and John 12:8). Many fiscally responsible, self-denying, working poor have lost life savings, homes, cars, relationships and in some case, sanity. Others have committed suicide in the wake of embezzlement by investors. Why did these losses occur? Some authorities claim the collapse occurred because of illiquidity, shrinkage in consumer credit, corporate excesses (i.e., greed), evaporation of the Real Estate bubble, loss of consumer confidence in the U.S. financial system, overzealous financial deregulation and lack of financial oversight of our capital markets. Whatever the cause, **one thing is certain, as in the days of Zephaniah, God WILL leave an afflicted and poor people in our midst** (Zephaniah 3:12).

God in His providence has afflicted individuals to test and prove others (Welfare Ministry, 186.1). Why would a merciful, loving God preserve and afflicted and poor people in our midst to test and prove us? God wants 21st century Christians to avoid the syndromes that Ezekiel vividly describes. Examine Ezekiel 22:29 and 16:49! "The

people of the land oppressed, robbed and vexed the poor, needy and the stranger (Ezekiel 22:29) and being filled with pride and an abundance of bread; loving careless ease, they failed to strengthen the hands of the poor and needy (Ezekiel 16:49). **God wants His people to avoid the callousness of oppression and abandonment of the poor.**

We do well to recall the promise: "Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Revelation 22:14). Equally important for our recall is the example of "...Cornelius..., [who] feared God..., gave much alms to the people and prayed to God always; [and] his prayers and alms... [came] up for a memorial before God" (Acts 10:1-4). This background provided the impetus for the study question of this lesson.

STUDY QUESTION

What does the Bible say to Christians about the poor, afflicted and the needy in our midst?

ANSWER SOURCE: HOLY BIBLE

1. "When [you] make a feast [Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years, Independence and birthdays], **call** the poor, crippled, lame and the blind" (Luke 14:13).
2. "[**Give**] ...bread to the hungry, bring the poor that are cast out to thy house and cover the naked" (Isaiah 58:7).
3. "**Defend** the poor and fatherless, **do justice** to the afflicted and needy" (Psalms 82:3).
4. "**Deliver** the poor and needy..." (Psalms 82:4).

5. If you lend money to my people, the poor, you shall not be to him/her a usurer [one who charge exorbitant or unlawful interest]; you shall **charge [zero] interest** (Exodus 22:25).
6. If [your] brother grows poor and falls into decay..., then [you] shall **relieve** him, [even if] he [is] a stranger or sojourner... (Leviticus 25:35).
7. If there [is a poor man] among you, any one of [your] brethren, in one of [your] gates ...[you] shall **NOT harden [your] heart**, nor [close your] hand from [your] brother in need (Deuteronomy 15:7).
8. "...**Open [your] hand** bountifully unto [your] brother, to the poor and to the needy in [the] land" (Deuteronomy 15:11).
9. "When you reap the harvest of your land, [you] shall **not... reap the corners** of the field; ...the gleanings of the harvest [you] shall ...not gather; ...leave them unto the poor and the stranger, I am Jehovah your God" (Leviticus 23:22). Translated into 21st century language, do not spend 100% of your paycheck on yourself and/or your family.
10. "...**Break off [your] sins by righteousness and [your] iniquities by showing mercy to the poor...**" (Daniel 4:27).
11. "As we have... opportunity, let us do good UNTO ALL [MANKIND], especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10).

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS: Sharing resources with the needy is not entirely reserved for social service agencies. God assigns the responsibility of caring for the needy to each Christian. The instructions to NOT harden our hearts and OPEN our hands bountifully are imperatives for action, which must extend beyond the narrow confines of our denominations to encompass all human beings, irrespective of their religious, philosophical and political or any other categorizations that segregates people in need of help.

ANSWER SOURCE: SACRED WRITINGS

1. "Every soul is under special obligation to God to notice His worthy poor with particular compassion" (Welfare Ministry, 178.1).
2. "There is no question in regard to the Lord's poor. They are to be helped" (Welfare Ministry, 179.1).
3. "The poor and the needy are to be cared for" (Welfare Ministry, 182.3)!
4. **"Care must be taken that the means needed for this work shall not be diverted into other channels"** (Welfare Ministry, 179.2).
5. "Poverty and distress in families will come to our knowledge and afflicted and suffering ones will have to be relieved. **Do not wait for them to come to you**" (Welfare Ministry, 183.3).
6. "He has given you an abundance that you may supply those of their necessities, which by industry and economy they are not able to supply. **Do not wait for them to call your attention to their needs. Act...**" (Welfare Ministry, 183.2).

7. "The poor and the needy are to be cared for. These must not be neglected, at whatever cost or sacrifice to ourselves" (Welfare Ministry, 183.3).

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS: All whom God has called and blessed with His resources are under special obligation to notice His worthy poor. Rather than a wait-and-see approach, a proactive approach of surveillance and Outreach are implicit in ideas: "Do not wait for them to come to you" AND "Do not wait for them to call your attention to their needs." Any clearer presentation of the imperative to care for the poor might be rendered: "...this do in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:24).

DISCUSSION: WHAT DO THESE THINGS MEAN?

Have you noticed any patterns of communication in God's word regarding important issues? Examine Scripture's use of the word:

REMEMBER.

1. "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8).
2. "...Remember my covenant with Jacob..., Isaac and... Abraham... and I will remember the land" (Leviticus 26:42).
3. "Remember His marvelous works that he [has] done, his wonders and the judgments of his mouth" (1 Chronicles 16:12; Psalms 105:5);
4. "...Remember the works of the Lord..." (Psalms 77:11).
5. "Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope" (Psalms 119:49).
6. "...Remember David and all his afflictions" (Psalms 132:1).
7. "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32).
8. "...Remember the poor" (Galatians 2:10).

Each remembrance has a specific purpose and benefit for God's people. For example, **as David remembered God's marvelous works, "...[he] appropriated [God's] promises and privileges to himself, [thus] he decided that he would no longer be hasty in judgment, becoming discouraged and casting himself down in helpless despair.** His soul took courage as he contemplated the general character of God as displayed in His teaching, His forbearance, His surpassing greatness and mercy, and he saw that **the works and wonders of God are to have no confined application"** (SDA Bible Commentary, Vol. 3, {3BC} 1149.6). They are for all times, for all people and for all circumstances.

The instruction to remember the poor is a divine command. "God suffers His poor to be in the borders of every church. They are always to be among us and **the Lord places upon the members of every church a personal responsibility to care for them.** We are not to lay our responsibility upon others. Toward those within our own borders, we are to manifest the same love and sympathy that Christ would manifest were He in our place. Thus, **we are to be disciplined, that we may be prepared to work in Christ's lines"** (Testimonies for the Church, Vol.6 {6T} 272.2). **God has made provisions for the poor through those whom He blesses.**

"A season is coming when we shall have our principles tested. Let us begin to think what we can do for God's needy ones. We can make them through ourselves the recipients of God's blessings. **Think what widow, what orphan, what poor family you can relieve, not in a way to make a great parade about the matter, but be as a channel through which the Lord's substance shall flow as a blessing to His poor..."** (The Adventist Home, {AH} 474.4).

"THE LORD IS HONORED BY OUR ACTS OF MERCY, BY THE EXERCISE OF THOUGHTFUL CONSIDERATION FOR THE UNFORTUNATE AND DISTRESSED. **THE WIDOW AND THE FATHERLESS NEED MORE THAN OUR CHARITY. THEY NEED SYMPATHY, WATCHCARE, COMPASSIONATE WORDS AND A HELPING HAND TO PLACE THEM WHERE THEY CAN LEARN TO HELP THEMSELVES**" (Welfare Ministry {WM} 85.3). Although saved by grace, when we act faithfully toward the Lord's poor in obedience to His command, the faithful God has assurances and rewards for us.

ASSURANCES & REWARDS OF OBEDIENCE

Obedience has its reward. Examine Psalms, Deuteronomy, Luke, Proverbs, Isaiah and Revelation.

1. "Blessed is he that **considers/understands the poor**, the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble/day of evil" (Psalms 41:1).
2. "...**Give**... and [your] heart shall not be grieved... because... the Lord [your] God shall bless [you] in all [your] works and in all that [you] put [your] hand unto (Deuteronomy 15:10).
3. **Give and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over shall men give into your bosom. With the same measure that you [distribute] it shall be measured to you again**" (Luke 6:38).
4. "He that **gives to the** poor shall not lack..." (Proverbs 28:27).
5. "He that is **gracious to the poor** lends to Jehovah and what He has bestowed, [Jehovah] will repay unto him" (Proverbs 19:17).

6. Draw out your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul; then your light will rise in obscurity and your darkness will be as the noonday (Isaiah 58:10).
7. "Because you have kept the word of my patience, I also will keep [you] from the hour of temptation, which comes upon [the entire] world [Daniel 12:1] to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Revelation 3:10).
8. Because [you have] made the Lord... [your] habitation, ...no evil [will come upon you and no] plagues [shall] come [near] to [your] dwelling (Psalms 91:9-10).

The universality of the Scriptures presented above excludes neither rich nor poor from giving to the Lord's poor. In fact, the New Testament recorded the poor widow who casts all into the offering (Luke 21:1-4).

Disobedience also has its reward. Examine Proverbs and Welfare Ministry.

1. "[Whosoever] stops his ear at the cry of the poor he also shall cry and shall not be heard" (Proverbs 21:13).
2. "...He that withdraws his eyes [from the poor] shall have a curse" (Proverbs 28:27).
3. "...The light which for years has been before the church has been disregarded. The work... for suffering humanity in every church has not been done. Church members have failed to heed the Word of the Lord, and this has deprived them of an

experience they should have gained in gospel work" (Welfare Ministry, 182.2).

CONCLUSION: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

In conclusion, we have examined how the near collapse of the U.S. financial system has exacerbated poverty that is already among us. It is part of God's plan to test our fidelity and rid us of selfishness so He places the poor in our midst. God desires that we become a channel of blessing through which His substance can flow to His poor. Blessings are in store for those who trust and obey God. However **"...our brethren are most liberal to those whom they wish to honor and whose respect they desire... [They follow] custom and fashion, [which] say: give to those who will give to you; but this is not the Bible's rule of giving"** (The Adventist Home {AH} 474.3).

Transcendent altruism (selflessness) alone will guard against the tendency of **"...seeking to gain everything for [our] own advantage"** (Christ's Object Lesson, {COL} 267.3). **"Christ was an active, constant worker. He found the domain of religion fenced in by high, steep walls of seclusion...; [thus] He threw down the walls of partition and exercised His helping power in behalf of every one who needed Him. [Christ] brought cheerfulness and hope to the desponding... He did NOT ask, 'What is your creed? To what church do you belong?'** Active, earnest, loving interest marked His life..." (That I May Know Him, {TMK} 43.4). **"The Lord Jesus knows what poverty means. He [was] the great missionary to the poor, the sick, the suffering"** (TMK 43.5) AND [Christians] must follow in His footprints.

"Where ever a church is established it members are to do a faithful work for the needy believers [AND] ...others, irrespective of their faith" (Welfare Ministry, 180.1). **"There is a work to be done by our churches that few have any idea of. 'I was an hungry,' Christ says, 'and you gave me meat; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came unto me.'** **We shall have to give of our means to support laborers in the harvest field and we shall rejoice in the sheaves gathered in. But while this is right, THERE IS A WORK, AS YET UNTOUCHED, THAT MUST BE DONE"** (A Call to Medical Evangelism and Health Education, {CME} 22.5). **"God ...entrusts [people] with means, with talents and opportunities that they may be His agents in helping the poor and the suffering [and s/he] who uses his entrusted gifts as God designs becomes a co-worker with the Savior"** (Conflict and Courage, {CC} 300.5).

"The [earthly] mission of Christ [must now become our mission]. [His mission] was to heal the sick, encourage the hopeless [and] bind up the brokenhearted. This work of restoration ...among the needy, suffering ones of humanity [cascades to Christ's disciples]. God [requires] not only our benevolence but [also] our cheerful countenance, our hopeful words [and] the grasp of our hand. Relieve some of God's afflicted ones [who] are sick and hope has departed. Bring back the sunlight to them. There are souls who have lost their courage; speak to them, pray for them. There are those who need the bread of life; read to them from the Word of God; there is a soul sickness no balm can reach, no medicine heals. Pray for these and bring them to Jesus Christ. And in all your work, Christ will be present to make impressions upon human hearts" (A Call to Medical Evangelism and Health Education, {CME} 22.5).

CALL TO ACTION: WHAT SHALL WE DO?

Brethren, "...set in order the things that are wanting..." (Titus 1:5) "and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die" (Revelation 3:2). "...God has... secured for Himself a people to whom He could entrust sacred and vital truth for future ages... for all who need them..." (3BC 1149.4). We must obey God by ministering to the needy for in doing so we are ministering to [Jesus] (That I May Know Him, {TMK} 43.3). Pastors, Elders and Church Board members, follow the example of the Chief of the fathers [who] led out in offering their substance to help defray the expense of rebuilding the temple [under] Zerubbabel (a.k.a Sheshbazzar), ...governor of the company [that returned] to Judea. And as the leaders demonstrated exemplary conduct, the people, following their example, gave freely of their meager [resources] (Ezra 2:64-70 in (Prophets and Kings {PK} 559.2).

It is time to realign church budgets so religious spending and distribution practices reflect priorities established by Jesus Christ. If our leaders practice what they preach, members will be motivated to realign personal budgets to support noble efforts. Let us who "profess to know God... [not] deny [Christ in works]" (Titus 1:16). Personal health, quick responses to our prayer requests (Isaiah 58:8-9) and walking the streets of gold depend on how we treat the Lord's poor. Jesus said, "Behold, I come quickly and my reward is with me to give every person as his/her work shall be" (Revelation 22:12). Surely, every believer wants to hear from the Master: "I was hungry and you gave me meat" (Matthew 25:35). Then, **"...Look to [God] as the giver of [you] possess;** ...look to Him for counsel... [and] **in whatever department of the work [you] are placed, [let God] ...control your mind... [to] do PERFECT work"** (COL 349.2).