

CARING FOR THE POOR

By Pastor Denzel Fenn

I grew up in an era where it was assumed, that if you were poor it was because you were lazy. I had reached mid-life before I realized, that for the most part, that was unfair and inaccurate.

Now there is no doubt about it – if you are lazy chances are that you will be poor. The Bible certainly does not condone laziness. The Book of Proverbs, the Book of Wisdom, states, “a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands – so shall your poverty come.” And “he who has a slack hand becomes poor.”

Paul set the parameters when he wrote the church saying, “if anyone will not work, neither should he eat.” He was not referring to those who cannot work but those who would not work.

But this article is not about the free loaders. It is not about those who are poor because of choices. It is about those who are poor through no fault of their own. Millions of people are poor as a result of oppressive governments, calamity, natural disasters or the death of the breadwinner. The Bible especially points out the needs of the widow, the orphan, the refugee and the sick and disabled. It is these I am writing about.

I was recently reminded of these things as I watched a program where parents were selling their girls to the brothels to obtain money to feed their remaining children. It was heart wrenching to contemplate this.

Sometime back our church paid for the release of several of these girls and we placed them in safe homes to be educated and cared for. Our family has sponsored orphans for years.

Africa has millions of widows and orphans as a result of the AIDS pandemic. Many of you who read this have given and it is making a difference.

God has a special place in His heart for the poor. He commanded the people of Israel to leave some unharvested grain in the fields and some fruit in the orchards for the poor. God said, “if there is among you a poor man of your brethren ...you shall not harden your heart, nor shut your hand, but you shall open your hand wide to him. You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand” (**Deut. 15:7-8,10**).

Further God instructed, “defend the poor and the fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and the needy” (**Psalms 82:3**). And again, “learn to do good, seek justice, rebuke the oppressor, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow” (**Isaiah 1:17**).

God repeatedly reprimanded those who neglected the poor. God described Sodom’s sins as “pride, fullness of food and abundance of idleness, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy” (**Ezekiel 16:49**). Apparently God saw their sin of neglecting the poor on par with their better known sins. For all of them judgement came.

God reprimanded the rulers of Israel and asked them, “what do you mean by crushing My people and grinding the faces of the poor” (**Isaiah**

3:15). This conduct is repeated by totalitarian governments around the world at this moment.

The Old Testament closes with a warning from God. He said, “I will come near to you for judgement; I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans and against those who turn away a refugee – because they do not fear Me” (**Malachi 3:5**).

The New Testament continues the theme. Jesus stated in His opening message that He had come with good news for the poor. He said that He had come to heal broken hearts and to lift up the oppressed. And everywhere He went He sought out the poor, the broken and the disenfranchised.

The early church was careful to care for the poor. One of Paul’s major projects was to collect and distribute funds to the poor. James said that true religion was to care for the widows and the orphans. John asked the question, “but whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?”

Finally, one of the most powerful incentives is the coming day of evaluation. Read what Jesus had to say: “Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’

Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see

You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’”

We cannot help everyone, but everyone could help someone.