

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Deuteronomy: Moses' Great Appeal For Israel To Obey God For Blessing Part V: Specific Treaty Stipulations Of The Great King, Deuteronomy 12-26 Q. Heeding God's Will On Responding To Income Inequality (Deuteronomy 23:19-25)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

A lot of economists, politicians and citizens today are talking about the issue of "income inequality" in our country, and many are divided over how to respond to it:

(1) We certainly do have income inequality in America: (a) the article, "Class in America: Mobility, measured," in the February 1st, 2014 issue of The Economist, p. 23, claimed "the soaring share of overall income" is "going to the top 1%," and "that bodes ill for those whose skills are less in demand. Many economists worry that living standards for the non-elite will stagnate for a long time." (b) Then, Rana Foroohar's article, "Time to Talk About the *I* Word," in the February 10, 2014 issue of Time, p. 23, claimed income inequality is "bad, and its' going to get worse," that a "new McKinsey Global Institute study found that 230 million white collar jobs, representing some \$9 trillion in income, will be transformed or even eliminated by computers in the next decade." (Ibid.)

(2) Aside from the presence of income inequality itself, Americans are divided over how to handle it: (a) On the one hand, President Obama's State of the Union Address was "almost entirely devoted to policy ideas designed to bridge the wealth gap" (Ibid.), and his politically liberal stance calls for more government programs since "(l)iberal policy makers have long regarded Scandinavian policies as a model. If a welfare state can work there, they have long argued, it can work here," Michael Barone, "How ObamaCare Misreads America," The Wall Street Journal, February 3, 2014, p. A15. (b) Conversely, "Paul Ryan and Marco Rubio, two leading Republicans, recently gave speeches decrying social immobility and demanding more effort to ensure poor people who work hard can better their lot," Ibid., The Economist. (c) A third view, that held by The Wall Street Journal editorial, "The 2014 Selloff," February 4, 2014, p. A10 argued "both parties in Washington are debating income inequality rather than how to increase growth and lift everyone's incomes," a move that the editor wrote rises by "tax and immigration reform and regulatory relief."

Need: *Thus, we ask, "How does God want us to respond to the great income inequality that exists in the world?!"*

- I. **When Deuteronomy 23:19-25 was written, Israel faced exposure to Canaanite idolatry upon entering the Promised Land, and a key form of idolatry is materialism and covetousness, cf. Colossians 3:5b KJV.**
- II. **Now, God promised to give Israel economic prosperity if she obeyed His Law, Deuteronomy 28:1-14.**
- III. **However, due to sin in man, even Jesus under the Law said Israel would ALWAYS have the poor in her midst (Matthew 26:11), meaning it is futile to try to equalize human income levels in a sinful world!**
- IV. **So, in view of the relentless presence of income inequality in the world, Deuteronomy 23:19-25 taught how the rich and poor were to relate to one another and to God in edifying ways without covetousness:**
 - A. The **rich** were to **help the poor without taking covetous, unjust advantage of them**, Deuteronomy 23:19-20:
 1. Deuteronomy 23:19 parallels Exodus 22:25 and Leviticus 25:35-37 to teach the "brother" who borrowed was a fellow Israelite who needed the loan as he faced a financial crisis, Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 304.
 2. To charge interest on such a loan would only further burden an already destitute man, so the loaning party was not to charge interest, but to lend in order to help the borrower become financially sound, Ibid.
 3. They could charge interest to foreigners in capitalistic ventures, but not to destitute fellow Hebrews, for added debt at high interest only compounded a poor man's plight, and God also promised to bless the loaning party materially if he heeded this command, Deuteronomy 23:20.
 - B. All men, **rich and poor** alike, were to **avoid covetousness in relating to God**, Deuteronomy 23:21-23:
 1. Any man in Israel, rich or poor, could make a vow unto the Lord.
 2. However, he was not to hold back covetously on what he owed in paying his vow, be he rich or poor, for God would not tolerate such idolatrous covetousness in anyone's relationship with Him, Deut. 23:21.
 3. No one had to make a vow, but, if he did, he had to pay for it or be judged for coveting, Deut. 23:22-23.
 - C. The **poor** were to **meet their needs without covetously stealing from the rich**, Deuteronomy 23:24-25:
 1. God directed that a party in need of eating food could enter his neighbor's vineyard or field of standing grain and eat of the crops there to satisfy his immediate hunger need, Deuteronomy 23:24a, 25a.
 2. However, he could not greedily bring a vessel to collect crops to carry away or greedily use a tool to harvest the crops in thus stealing from the farmer, Deuteronomy 23:24b, 25b.

3. [Jesus and His disciples relied on this law in Luke 6:1 when they picked and ate grain in a grain field.]
- V. **Then, to apply God's Deuteronomy 23:19-25 call to try to help the financially challenged find financial stability, we note Scripture offers helpful financial advice for those in the Church era who no longer live under the Law and its financial welfare promises, and we offer six major points of that advice as follows:**
- A. First, God promises to meet the material needs of the believer who heeds God's will for his life, Phil. 4:19 with James 4:13-17. We must thus first obey God, especially relative to our choice and location of occupation.
 - B. Second, 2 Corinthians 9:6-10 promises today's believer to provide for his ongoing income if he gives a portion of what he earns to support God's ministries, all as an incentive to keep him supporting God's ministries.
 - C. Third, Proverbs 24:27 teaches the need to plan to make a good income before one builds a house or has a family, so we should plan ahead on how to earn a good income before we address other goals that cost money.
 - D. Fourth, passages like Proverbs 24:30-34 and 27:23-27 teach God equips one to avoid or to overcome economic hardship if he constantly pays heed to his financial affairs and works diligently to earn his income.
 - E. Fifth, Proverbs 22:7 claims that the borrower is servant to the lender, a position of hardship, so we should try to avoid indebtedness by (1) budgeting to spend less than we earn and (2) saving up to buy items with cash.
 - F. Sixth, Ecclesiastes 11:1-6 is timelessly applicable on investing our earned assets for good returns: We should invest (1) **aggressively** (Eccl. 11:1a), (2) **long-term** (Eccl. 11:1b), (3) with **full diversification**, putting assets into 7 [completeness] or even 8 realms (Eccl. 11:2a-3) and (4) **keep adding** to our investments (Eccl. 11:4-6).

Lesson: *Due to the ever-present existence of income inequality, God directed that ALL men in Israel, rich and poor alike, were to live WITHOUT COVETOUSNESS in ALL RELATIONSHIPS: (1) the RICH were to HELP the POOR GAIN FINANCIAL STABILITY and NOT TAKE COVETOUS ADVANTAGE of them, (2) the POOR were to MEET their IMMEDIATE LIVELIHOOD needs WITHOUT STEALING COVETOUSLY from the RICH, and (3) ALL men, rich and poor alike, were to relate to GOD WITHOUT the IDOLATRY of COVETOUSNESS!*

Application: *May we (1) trust in Christ to be saved, John 3:16. (2) Then, may we (a) NOT try to defeat income inequality, for as long as sin exists on earth, that is a futile goal (Matthew 26:11). Yet, (b) may we edify the poor in seeking to help them be financially sound, and (c) may we meet our own needs while also respecting the property of those richer than us, (d) being content with what we have, knowing God will supply to meet our needs so we can do His will, Hebrews 13:5-6 KJV. (e) If we suffer financial hardship, may we heed God's Scripture advice [above].*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

The Great Depression, like our current era, highlighted the issue of income inequality on a huge scale, for a few people became very wealthy in the stock market while many Americans financially struggled. However, testimonies of believers in Christ who lived in that era instruct us on dealing with the same issue today, and one such testimony comes to us from the Winter, 2000 issue of Dallas Theological Seminary's alumni circular, Dallas Connection. It ran an interview with beloved Bible teacher and longtime professor of Bible Exposition at the seminary, Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost. In the interview, he spoke of the days when he began attending the seminary in 1937 a few years after the Great Depression hit with its hardships that especially affected seminaries like Dallas that were supported entirely by freewill offerings. Dr. Pentecost testified, "We were moved by the sacrifice of the faculty, who were underpaid -- not paid -- and yet gave themselves to their teaching with passion. It was Dr. Chafer's faith that so marked me, for he would share with us on occasion the many times the Seminary was on the verge of closing because of lack of finances. And then he'd share the spectacular way in which God answered prayer. Dr. Chafer was such an example of one who walked by faith. It marked us profoundly."

Though the Great Depression cost a lot of people a lot of financial losses, God used that era to forge Christians in the crucible of trials to understand their need to live by faith in the Lord. As such, the issue of "income inequality" became a non-issue for them because they learned not to focus on making money as their final goal in life, but to heed the Lord's will for their lives, looking to Him to meet their every material need so they could fulfill His will.

May we respond to the issue of income inequality in the world by (1) trusting in Christ as Savior not only to be saved (John 3:16), but also to come under God's livelihood care (Philippians 4:19). (2) Then, may we treat those who are richer than we are with consideration and respect their property, and (3) may we treat those who are poorer than we are with consideration, seeking to help them become financially sound, (4) all while trusting God to meet our needs so we can focus NOT on the ACCUMULATION of WEALTH as our life's GOAL, but on doing God's will and seeing HIM provide all we NEED to COMPLETE that will.