

## A Theology of Wealth, Possessions and Life

A Consideration from God's Word

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And all who believed were together, and had all things in common; and they were selling the properties and possessions and they were distributing them to all, whoever had need.

Acts 2:44-45

And the heart and soul of the full *number* of those believing were one, and not one said his possessions were his own, but all things were common to all.

Acts 4:32

Jesus Christ had never commanded His disciples to share their possessions and distribute them among the poor of their group. Yet, in that short time since the Church began, these early believers were sharing their possessions. The night before His crucifixion, Christ had given His disciples a command, "Love one another, in the manner as I have loved you" (John 13:34). He had promised them that He would send the Spirit when He would return to the Father (John 14:17). The Spirit had come. The believers were experiencing a new relationship to and work by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was giving them the ability to keep that new command. One way in which they were keeping that new command was to meet the material needs of one another.

About Twenty years later, James wrote the believing Jews, "From where do wars and fights among you come? *Are they* not from your base pleasures which act as soldiers in your members? You crave and do not have, you murder and are zealous for, and do not obtain, you fight and war. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive because you ask in an evil manner (with evil motives?), that you might spend it upon your base pleasures. You adulteresses, do you not know that fondness for the world is hostility towards God? Whoever determines to be a friend of the world constitutes himself<sup>1</sup> God's enemy" (James 4:1-3).

Approximately Forty years after James wrote, John warned the young men in the churches of the outlying area of Ephesus, "Stop loving the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any one loves the world, the love for the Father is not in him." (1 John 2:15). Several verses later, He explained, "By this we experientially know the love, that that one laid down His life in our place, and we are obliged to lay down our lives on behalf of the brothers. Now, whoever might have the life material (physical substance) of the world, and sees with perception his brother having need, and might close his gut feelings (compassion) from him, how does God's love remain at ease in him?" (1 John 3:16-17). To more further elucidate John's

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<sup>1</sup> Middle voice of καθίστημι.

point, he clarifies in 4:20 and 21, “If anyone should say that I love God and hates His brother, he is a liar. For the one not loving his brother whom he has seen, is not able to love God whom he has not seen. And we have this commandment from Him, that the one loving God, should also love his brother.” From these statement, we conclude, if a believer loves the world, he isn’t loving God; he isn’t loving God because he isn’t loving his brother, he isn’t loving his brother for he refuses to use his resources to meet his brother’s genuine needs.

In the 1940’s Carl Henry penned a criticism of the then Christian Fundamentalists titled *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. Henry, rising from among the Fundamentalists saw issues within the movement with which he was uncomfortable. He wrote, “But what is almost wholly unintelligible to the naturalistic and idealistic groups, burdened as they are for a new world order, is the apparent lack of any social passion in Protestant Fundamentalism. On this evaluation, Fundamentalism is the modern priest and Levite, by passing suffering humanity”<sup>2</sup> Henry looked about and saw issues in the world at large and the nearer culture and society among which he lived. He listed some of the issues which he felt were avoided, and that fundamentalist preachers should have been addressing in their preaching: aggressive warfare, racial hatred and intolerance, liquor traffic, exploitation of labor or management.<sup>3</sup> He was uncomfortable with what he saw as Fundamentalists’ neglect of these issues. As in the above quote, he compared these persons to the characters from Jesus’ account of the good Samaritan.

Henry’s concerns continue to find voices in the 21st Century. David Pratt’s *Radical* and Richard Stearns’ *A Hole in Our Gospel* express again the problems Henry saw. In a chapter titled American Wealth and a World of Poverty, Pratt points out that God is serious about how we respond to poverty. “The book of Proverbs warns about curses that come upon those who ignore the poor. The prophets warn of God’s judgment and devastation for those who trust in their riches, and James tells those who hoard their money and live in self-indulgence to ‘weep and wail because of the misery that is coming’ upon them.”<sup>4</sup> He asserts, “The Bible nowhere teaches that caring for the poor is a means by which we earn salvation. The means of our salvation is faith in Christ alone, and the basis of our salvation is the work of Christ alone.”<sup>5</sup> While he does not front-load the gospel, he undermines it in his next paragraph, “Indeed, caring for the poor (among other things) is *evidence* of our salvation.”<sup>6</sup> (emphasis his). Additionally, some writers of the Resurgence and Gospel Coalition view our bearing the image of God to include responsibilities. Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears explain, “We image God by serving him in ways that advance his kingdom, including **making culture that honors him**. This also includes fighting injustice, evil, and oppression by working for justice and mercy.” (emphasis mine)<sup>7</sup> In a chapter on the incarnation, they compare Jesus being sent by

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<sup>2</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1947). 17.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, 18.

<sup>4</sup> David Pratt, *Radical*, (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2010) 109.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, 109

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, 110.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Driscoll, Gerry Breshear, *Doctrine: What Christians Should Believe*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010) 141.

the Trinity as a missionary to our having “an incarnational missional life” living contextually by crossing cultural barriers.<sup>8</sup> They point out, “Nonetheless, Jesus dressed, spoke, and ate according to Jewish culture, participated in their holidays, and observed their customs, so Jesus’ people are also to live as missionaries in whatever culture God has sent them.”<sup>9</sup>

These recent charges aren’t leveled exclusively against Fundamentalism but Evangelicalism. Neither are they brought from the outside, but from within the larger movement of Evangelicalism. All four of the above writers would largely be classed as Evangelicals, though they would likely not consider themselves Fundamentalists per se.<sup>10</sup>

So, what are we to make of these charges against Fundamentalism and/or Evangelicalism? What is the relationship of the believers to the world, its issues and its needs? How are we to understand the many Scriptures cited in support of such charges? As dispensationalists, we might quickly write off these charges and their proponents as mishandling the word, but we need to consider many similar statements written directly to the Church by Paul and John including James’ statements cited above. So it appears there may be some legitimacy to the concerns of these authors.

The purpose of this paper is to briefly examine the Scriptures’ teaching on wealth, possessions and poverty, especially regarding the New Testament Grace believer. This will focus on only one charge by the above writers and that as it touches on wealth and possessions. I will approach this by considering the Bible’s vocabulary on these topics and how it presents God’s perspective and man’s perspective. I will look at a number of key texts addressing these issues from the Old Testament, the Gospels and the Epistles. It will be necessary to distinguish each context: audience, problem and purpose. It is hoped that we can draw a conclusion from all this information. That conclusion may or may not fit our present perspective. If the Bible’s information challenges our present understanding, then it is our understanding, not Scripture which needs to change.

## **The Vocabulary**

Before we begin considering the information, it will be helpful to list the key words followed by a brief working definition. In each of the following categories I have listed first the Hebrew words and then the Greek words. Note that some words, translated in our English Bibles by the same terms, have different primary ideas. Part of my goal in examining these words is to draw distinctions however small the distinction.

### OT words for wealth

*chavōd* כְּבוֹד - glory, weight

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 240-241.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* 241. It perhaps has not occurred to these authors that Jesus was born a Jew, of a Jewish woman, under the Law, to fulfill the Law which involved the customs and holidays which He observed. He did not do it to blend in to the culture or reach the people of the Jewish culture.

<sup>10</sup> We will not take up the issue of whether these two titles stand clearly for anything in the modern world. Some are asserting that both titles have lost any significance, being applied either so generally, or so specifically that neither finds a good representation in the “Christian world.”

*osher* עֲשֵׂר - wealth, from the verb (same radicals) meaning to become rich, related to *yesh* יֵשׁ to be straight or smooth, and thus to build up, erect leading to building wealth.

*chayil* חַיִל - strength

*nekes* נֶכֶס - riches, treasure, from the verb (same radicals) to gather, heap up or ref. to cattle.

*rekush* רְכוּשׁ - property, goods

*kōach* כֹּחַ - power, strength - one time translated “wealth” in the AV.

*ōn* אֹן - vigor, power, life - twice translated in the AV with some idea of substance or wealth and both could be simple references to might or vigor (Job 18:7; Hosea 12:4).

*hōn* הֹן - sufficient wealth - distinguished from *ōsher* in Psalm 112:3.

*yēsh* יֵשׁ - substance

*chōsen* חֹסֶן - treasure, wealth

*matemōn* מַטְמוֹן - hidden treasure, from a verb to hide (often by digging and burying) and hence something hidden, even grain (cf. Jeremiah 41:8).

*hamōn* הַמֹּן - abundance

*chemdah* חֶמְדָּה - desire, delightful thing

NT words for wealth

*mamōnos* μαμωνος - an Aramaic word for wealth or possessions

*ploutos* πλουτος - riches

*bios bios* - possessions which pertains to physical life in this world

OT words for riches - Not listed among words for “wealth.”

*gadōl* גדל great, greatness, therefore, wealth as related to greatness

*ōsher* עֵשֶׂר wealth, riches

*shua* שׁוּע a nobleman socially

NT words for riches - Not listed among words for “wealth.”

*ploutos* πλουτος and its cognates- from or equal to a word meaning “full” and including the idea of an abundance.<sup>11</sup>

OT words for possessions - Not listed among words for “wealth” or “riches.”

*achastzah* אַחֲזָזָה property, possession, from the root אָחַז meaning to seize, grab or take possession

NT words for possessions - Not listed among words for “wealth” or “riches.”

*peripoiāsis* περιποίησις and its cognates- that uniquely possessed or secured

*hyparxis* ὑπαρξις - original property

*hyparchō* ὑπαρχω - to exist i.e. as property, this occurs as a participle describing what belongs to, or exists as one’s property

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<sup>11</sup> J.H. Thayer, *The New Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Lafayette, IN: AP&A, 1979) 519.

Old Testament word for poor, poverty, widows and orphans

*oni* עָנִי - was to be afflicted or pressed down, to be low or humbled, both physically, spiritually or materially. It is distinct from לָדָל and אֶבְיֹוֹן by “emphasizing some disability or distress.”<sup>12</sup>

*rawash* רוּשׁ - is poor. Unger and White see it suggesting destitution.<sup>13</sup> This word occurs 24 times, 20 of which are in Proverbs.

*dal* לָדָל - is one who is low, or hangs low, therefore, poor

*muk* מָוֹד - one brought low

*ebyon* אֶבְיֹוֹן - is one who is needy or in want of something.

New Testament words for poor, poverty, etc.

*chāra* χηρα - widow, from a cognate meaning “bereft (of one’s spouse).”<sup>14</sup>

*ptōchos* πτωχος - poor person, from an unused verb meaning “to crouch, cower.”<sup>15</sup>

*ptōcheia* πτωχεια - poor state, poverty

*ptōcheuō* πτωχευω - to be poor, to be a beggar

*orphanos* ορφανος - orphaned, alone, destitute (2x)

*penās* πηνης - poor, as a laborer, from a verb meaning “to work for one’s daily bread.”<sup>16</sup> BAG illustrate this word meaning one who has nothing for this life, or has it sparingly and must pay attention to work, i.e. to eat and clothe himself.

*penichōros* πενυχρος - poor, needy

**An Examination of the terms more specifically  
The Poor or Lowly, the Widow and Orphan**

The first Hebrew word *oni* is used of one who is afflicted. Jacob described himself in this manner before his father-in-law Laban, if Laban sent him away empty handed (Genesis 31:42). Israel was instructed not to lend money at interest to the poor (Exodus 22:25). In this passage the verb “to lend” *nashah*<sup>17</sup> occurs, meaning to reject and in the Niphal and Hiphil to lead astray, perhaps a telling statement about the seriousness of lending. God instructed Israel on specific means of helping the poor *oni*, without giving them handouts. They were to leave the corners of their fields and the gleanings of their vineyards for the poor to glean (Leviticus 19:10; 23:22). Gleanings were not always available and so God warned Israel not to have a closed hand toward their poor brother (Deuteronomy 15:7-11). It is also important to notice that the poor would always be in the land. How does this square with the promise of blessing? How does the instruction to be generous square with the promise of blessing? God instructed the Israelis to not keep the wages of a poor or needy man, nor to oppress the poor or needy

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<sup>12</sup> *Nelson’s Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament* eds. Merrill F. Unger, William White Jr., (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1980) 295. >NEDOT

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, p. 295. Harkavy, Gesenius, Holladay, and the TWOT do not emphasize this distinction.

<sup>14</sup> F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) 216.

<sup>15</sup> G. Abbott-Smith, *A Greek Manual Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1937, 1948) 393.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*. 352.

<sup>17</sup> A Qal Participle of נָשָׂא. Alexander Harkavy noted that it properly meant “to press, hence: to loan on usury.” *Student’s Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (NY: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1914) 471.

(Deuteronomy 24:12-15). Isaiah three explained some of the reasons why God entered into judgment with Israel. The elders and princes of the people had in their homes the thing taken by robbery or plunder of the poor. They also ground *into the ground* the faces of the poor (vv. 14-15). The leaders of Israel had made statutes (combination of the verb and noun) so that the needy were deprived of a judge, they robbed the people of their judgment, took a spoil of widows and plundered orphans (Isaiah 10:2; cf. Ezekiel 22:23-31, **29**; Amos 8:2-6). In this latter case the plunder would have involved the possession of the land to which the orphan was entitled. God challenged Israel that going through the motions of keeping the law, without a real change of attitude towards other Israelis was empty. They were fasting to be heard from God, but failing to appreciate the need of the hungry, homeless poor, and naked (Isaiah 58:7). God informed them that had they acted as He had intended, they would have been seen as a righteous people, they would have shone brightly. The seriousness of oppressing the poor is seen by the list of other unrighteous activities (Ezekiel 18:12). God called Israel to action, to proper treatment of their fellow Jews but they refused (Zechariah 7:8-13). Numerous times the Psalmists describe God as the one who takes up the cause of the poor, because the wicked of the land oppress them (9:17-18; 10; 12; 37:12-16; 72:1-4; 82). The sage advised his son regarding the proper treatment of the poor (Proverbs 22:22-23).

The *dal* is a low one, and in some contexts clearly refers to the poor. As an illustration, it is used of the scrawny cows in Pharaoh's dream (Genesis 41:19). The *dal* is contrasted to the rich and one described as having insufficient means (lit. his hand is unable to reach) (Exodus 30:15; Leviticus 14:21). "The *dallim* constituted the middle class of Israel-those who were physically deprived (in the ancient world the majority of people were poor)."<sup>18</sup> While God warned Israel of perverting the justice of the needy, they were also not to favor (honor) the poor, i.e. to give special treatment (Exodus 23:2-3, 6; Leviticus 19:15). Justice was to be maintained whether for or against the poor. In contrast to Israel's perverted justice from her leaders, God promised that the Anointed one would judge the poor with righteousness (Isaiah 11:4). God called the upper class women of Samaria cows for their treatment of others and demands for themselves (Amos 4:1ff). They made certain that the poor remained poor by imposing heavy rent [*boshas* in a Polel Inf] (Amos 5:11-12). Being gracious to the poor was honor to the Maker (Proverbs 14:31; 19:17; 22:9). The righteous was distinguished because he knew the rights of the poor in contrast to the evil (Proverbs 29:7).

One who was brought low (made poor, *muk*) may have had to sell himself to a fellow Israeli. He was to be sustained and not treated like a slave (Leviticus 25:35-39, 47ff). His family was to redeem any land he had been required to sell because of his need (Leviticus 25:25).

The Hebrew *evyon* is one in need or want. While God assured Israel that there would always be poor [*oni*] in the land, He also assured them that there would not be needy [*evyon*] in the land (Deuteronomy 15:4). The reason for this is that those who had, were to meet the need. It did not remove poverty, but the person was not to be left in need. This is a balance. God did not call His people alleviate poverty and spread the wealth, but they were to address the needs: food, clothing. The seventh year sabbath was to provide for the needy. The volunteer crop in the seventh year, whether field, vineyard, or grove was for the needy, that is, they could harvest it for themselves (Exodus 23:11). God called them "wicked people" who did not plead (act as judge) for the orphan because it prospered him, and did not defend (judge) the rights (judgments) of the poor (Jeremiah 5:28). God refused to remove the judgment of Israel

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<sup>18</sup> NEDOT, 296.

for their transgressions, among them, they sold the needy for a pair of sandals (Amos 2:6) and later were buying them (i.e. to be slaves; Amos 8:6).

Among the poor the widow is often listed. The Hebrew אִלְמָנָה *almanah* is used exclusively of widows and is therefore an easy term to define. In some passages the Hebrew word “woman” is interpreted by context to be a widow. Frequently the term orphan is associated with the widow. The term literally meant one who is fatherless. God told Israel not to afflict any widow (Exodus 22:22). They were reminded that God takes up the cause of the widow (Deuteronomy 10:18; cf. Psalm 68:5; 146:9). God designated the tithe every third year to be shared with the alien, orphan and widow along with the Levite (Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 24:12-14). A widow’s garment was not to be taken as the pledge or binding material of an agreement (Deuteronomy 24:17). Sheaves left behind, gleanings of olives, or vines were to be left for the orphan or widow (Deuteronomy 24:19-21). God pronounced a curse [binding to judgment] on any who distorted the just for an alien, orphan or widow (Deuteronomy 27:19). The book of Ruth recounts the righteous acts of a man, who obeyed the law regarding the widow of his cousin, at a time when every man was doing what was right in his own eyes. Jehovah refused to listen to the prayers of Israel, but asked them to learn to do good, to seek justice and strive (plead) for the widow or defend the orphans (Isaiah 1:17). God asked for this because Israel’s leaders did not help those people, but acted upon taking bribes, i.e. if unpaid, they did not do their job (1:23). In 10:2 Isaiah described the leaders as taking advantage of the orphans and widows, plundering them. Jehovah sent Jeremiah to the king of Judah and tell him and his men to do justice and righteousness, and to deliver orphans and widows from those who robbed them (Jeremiah 22:3). The word “robbed” is to take, strip or plunder by force. Ezekiel prophesied against Israel’s leaders because they had mistreated so many people including the fatherless and widow (Ezekiel 22:7). God promised to draw near in judgment because Israel’s leaders oppressed widows among many others (Malachi 3:5). The Psalmist wrote against the wicked for they slay the widow, stranger, and orphan (Psalm 94:6).

The attitude of Old Testament people (believers or unbelievers) towards possessions.

Many times the word for wealth in the NASB is the Hebrew word *chabvod*, the word glory. The word meant weight or reputation. The idea was that one’s reputation or glory was defined by his possessions or wealth (Genesis 31:1). Wealth probably communicated the idea, but the statement meant the weight or reputation demonstrated by the number of one’s possessions. When God promised judgment, He asked where they would leave their glory, their weight (Isaiah 10:3). Nahum 2:9 clearly applies glory to physical objects of wealth.

The dominant word for wealth is *chayil*. This word predominantly means strength. Used of wealth it pictures one’s possessions as his strength or source of strength. To lose wealth was to be deprived of strength. One could not eat, if one did not have the material resources to acquire food. The same idea could be applied to the need for clothing, shelter, and protection. All these required material substance. To remove that substance from a city, meant that the farmers in an outlying area had no place to retreat when they came under attack, therefore, they were open to plunder. This is the idea of Obadiah 11, 13; Micah 4:13; Zephaniah 1:13. During the coming 1,000 year kingdom the nations will bring their wealth (strength) to Jerusalem, making them dependent upon Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:14). That wealth or strength can be in the form of food, or that which allows one to purchase food. So Israel is promised that she will eat the wealth of nations, because those nations will bring their wealth to Jerusalem (Isaiah 60:5, 11; 61:6).

In Proverbs (19x), the dominant word for wealth is *hon*, which means that which is sufficient, that which maintains a way of life. It is illustrated by contrast to poverty in Proverbs 10:15 where it is a fortress which protects one from calamity. In this same verse the sage relates *hon* to *osher* that which is piled up, amassed, built up or saved. A cognate of this word describes a rich man. The implication is that it is riches because it is piled up. A little is not riches, a pile, or that built up is. The writer of Proverbs warns that the one who has an evil eye hastens to wealth (*osher*, 28:22). The verb “hasten” [*bahal*] means to run or rush rashly, stupidly.<sup>19</sup> The dominant meaning of the word is sudden terror or disaster, so here running after that which comes suddenly as a disaster. Such a person sees his wealth as a strong city, a high-walled city protecting him, but this is only in his imagination (18:11). There is the encouragement and warning that wealth added by the hand (i.e. work) increases, but by fraud is small or becomes small (13:11). One could use wealth to make friends, in contrast to selfishness or begging from others (19:4). The idea being that people who are always asking for help lose friends, they avoid them. Proverbs 11:4 demonstrates that riches are not equivalent to righteousness. Finally, in Proverbs 28:8 the warning is given as a positive statement that the increase of wealth by charging interest (forbidden in the Law), was wealth for those who would be favorable to the poor. The writer indicates that God is just and ultimately will take the wrongly gained wealth and give it to those who will use it lawfully.

The Hebrew word *nekes* describes amassed wealth. Joshua 22:8 illustrates that riches can be comprised of a variety of things: livestock, silver, gold, bronze, iron, and clothes. The writer of Ecclesiastes twice credits God as the source of a man’s riches (5:19; 6:2). He is not stating that all riches come from God, he is simply giving examples of individuals who did have riches given by God. This was the case with Solomon. God gave Solomon riches after Solomon asked for wisdom (2 Chronicles 1:11, 12).

The verb and noun family *osher* views wealth as amassed or built up. Abraham refused to take the spoils of war from Melchizedek so that Melchizedek could not say that he had enriched Abraham (Genesis 14:23). Here spoils of war, including a thong or sandal, comprised riches. When Hannah dedicated Samuel to God, she prayed to God. In that prayer she attributed men’s poverty or riches to God (1 Samuel 2:7). Solomon was greater than all other kings in riches and wisdom (1 Kings 10:23). Through Jeremiah, God accused the rich in Judah of enriching themselves by deceit, by setting traps for the people (Jeremiah 4:25-27). They did not plead the cause of orphans or the poor (v. 28). Some trust in their wealth, boast in their riches and were foes of the Psalmist (Psalm 49:5-6). The man trusting in riches is contrasted to the one who trusts God or makes God his fortress (refuge) (Psalm 52:7). Such a one will fall (Proverbs 11:16). However, when God makes rich, He doesn’t bring sorrow with the riches (Proverbs 10:22). The wise man wrote that a name is better than great riches (Proverbs 22:1). The writer also warns about wearying one’s self to gain wealth (Proverbs 23:4). The better situation was to be neither poor or rich (Proverbs 30:8). The sage expressed the human conclusion that wealth does not come because of an individual’s wisdom or discernment, but sometimes it is simply a matter of time and occurrence (Ecclesiastes 9:11). He seems to be saying that sometimes wealth is a matter of someone being in the right place at the right time. Yet the preacher acknowledged that God causes wealth (6:2). God gave Solomon riches [*osher*], wealth [*chayil*] and glory, because he asked for wisdom rather than these (2 Chronicles 1:11-12). God gave Hezekiah great possessions [*rekush*], one of Judah’s “righteous” kings (2 Chronicles

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<sup>19</sup> See בָּהָל as a Niphal Part., Harkavy, op.cit. 51.



32:29). The Preacher saw contrasting situations with God-given wealth: sometimes God provided the means to enjoy it and sometimes He denied the ability to enjoy one's wealth (Ecclesiastes 5:10; 6:2). This contrast may pivot upon one's attitude toward the wealth. The pursuit of wealth for its satisfaction, the love of silver or abundance leaves such satisfaction illusive. However, the one doing God's commands and fear God as in Psalm 112:1 is able to enjoy the wealth, for it is not the main source of his satisfaction.

The noun *achastzah* occurs with a positive sense, referring to the land as Israel's God-given possession (Genesis 17:8 et al). Ezekiel's vision of the future temple, city and land employs this term for the Levite's possession and the Prince's possession. Abraham purchased a field and a tomb for burial which became his possession (Genesis 49:30). Each Israeli (Levite's excepted) was allotted a possession which even if lost due to debt, reverted to that family in the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:10, 13).

### **NT Thoughts on Riches and Possessions**

In the N.T. the noun *ploutos* is used once in all three synoptics, but the idea of rich persons *plousios* is used three times in Matthew, twice in Mark and eleven times in Luke. The verb *pluteo* to make rich, or enrich occurs twice in Luke. In Luke these words often bear a negative emphasis, or describe persons opposed to God's plan and design. The rich are already receiving their comfort (Luke 6:24). This is because they are not righteous and their wealth is a sign of their unrighteousness. Jesus warned people not to invite only their rich neighbors but those who could not repay (Luke 14:12-13). The rich man is contrasted to poor Lazarus in Luke 16. The rich man was grieved at Jesus' requirement for being a disciple, and Jesus responded that it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom (18:23, 25). Here also, Jesus used *chrama* stuff or possessions. Zaccheus was very rich, and by the context, had acquired his wealth by abuse of his position (Luke 19:2). Jesus contrasted the rich giving gifts in the temple to the widow who gave her whole life (*bios*) or that which was necessary for her life (cf 1 John 3:17-18). This later word *bios* is used five times in Luke of the things for this life.

The Greek *mamonas* also refers to wealth but is a neutral term (once in Matthew, twice in Luke). Louw and Nida disagree on the neutral emphasis, stating, "wealth and riches, with a strongly negative connotation — 'worldly wealth, riches.'"<sup>20</sup> Jesus warned people that one can not serve both God and mammon (Luke 16:13), but had to modify mammon with the adjective unrighteous and by its source in unrighteousness (a Genitive). This would mean that mammon or wealth can come from unrighteous acts or attitudes. It could be suggested that one might possess wealth without such attention or interest in it that he is said to serve it.

The idea of possessions is also represented by the word *ptaomai* (three times in the gospels 2x Luke) and *huparcho* (3x in Matthew, 15x in Luke (9x of possessions)). The rich young man had much *ptaoma* and left grieved at Jesus' instructions to sell them and follow Him (Matthew 19:22; Mark 10:22). The verb encompasses the acquisition of many varying things: precious metals, one's life, a field, even a spouse (a "vessel" metaphorically). In six passages in Acts Luke used two forms of *huparcho*. Though translated with some idea of possessions, *huparcho* means to be or exist. In these occurrences as a participle, the word represents "the

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<sup>20</sup> *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, eds Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, (NY: United Bible Societies, 1988, 1989 Second Edition). Electronic text hypertexted and prepared by OakTree Software, Inc. Version 3.7.

things existing” of someone or for someone.<sup>21</sup> So though not a proper noun for possessions it does look at things as belonging or existing specifically for an individual.

### **Understanding the OT situation**

God established Israel as a nation. While religion or the worship of God played a key role in their existence, Israel existed as a national group with not only religious laws but civil laws. In fact, God made no significant distinction between the religious aspects of the Law and the civil. As an example, the Ten Commandments include commands regarding Israel’s attitude toward God with respect to false gods (other gods and images), and a rule about bearing false witness against one’s neighbor. It included a rule about the proper and improper use of God’s name, and a rule against stealing. It included a rule for the cessation of labor on a specific day of the week, and a rule against murder. Israel had a socio/religious law as a God-formed nation.

Had Israel kept the Law they would have been a unique people. The peoples around them would have observed their lives and their blessings, stating, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people” (Deuteronomy 4:6). Israel would ask, “What great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him?” (v. 7). God gave Israel statutes and judgments of a righteous character to govern their social as well as religious lives. It was one law for one people, Israel.

The law contained commands that addressed both national and individual responses to needs within their nation: poverty, loss, cheating, widows, orphans. God made it clear that no Israeli was to take advantage of any other Israeli, nor was anyone to show favoritism toward either rich or poor (Exodus 23:3<sup>22</sup>; Leviticus 19:15<sup>23</sup>; Deuteronomy 1:17<sup>24</sup>). God instructed them not to take bribes as bribes blind the eyes of the wise and overturn words of righteousness (Exodus 23:8; Deuteronomy 16:19). It seems implied that a bribe is most easily offered by the wealthy, and the poor have nothing to give for a bribe. This would tilt justice in favor of the wealthy.

The Law required land owners to let their land lie fallow<sup>25</sup> every seventh year (Exodus 23:11). In that year the needy [*ebyon*] of their people would be allowed to eat the volunteer crop. We might view this as a form of welfare for any who would work for it by gathering the volunteer crop. God commanded Israel to bring their whole tithe to their local city (gate) every third year (Deuteronomy 14:28; 26:12). The Levite, stranger, orphan and widow would eat from this provision (v. 29). This was a more general welfare provision. God explained that there would be no needy in the land for He was going to bless them (Deuteronomy 15:4). He then addressed the issue of the needy in the land (e.g. vv. 7, 9). The needy would be present, but if the people shared their blessings from God, the needy would not exist. In this vein, God told Israel not to harden their heart or close their hand to their brother (Deuteronomy 15:7). They

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<sup>21</sup> It is modified by Genitive pronouns “his” or “theirs” or the Dative pronoun (of advantage) “for him,” though in the latter case, it is translated as a possessive.

<sup>22</sup> Qal Imperfect of *הדר* to honor, or adorn.

<sup>23</sup> Qal Imperfect of *נשא* to lift up with the noun face

<sup>24</sup> Hiphil Imperfect of *נכר* to cause to regard or recognize used with the noun face.

<sup>25</sup> *שׁוּט* Qal Imperfect to let free, let drop and *נָטַח* Qal Perfect to abandon or allow.

were to really give<sup>26</sup> to their needy brother and not to have an evil heart when they did so (Deuteronomy 15:10). The needy would never cease from the land (v. 11). This allowed for a test of the people's attitude toward God and one another. Obedience to God's command of generosity would bring God's blessing (Deuteronomy 14:29; 15:10).

The Old Testament records the progressive neglect, reversal, and twisting of these commands so that the rich and powerful ground the poor into the ground. Through His prophets, God indicted the people for their actions. The prophets brought numerous charges of this nature against Israel. The following are just a sample. Through Amos God charged Israel with selling the righteous for money and the needy for a pair of sandals (Amos 8:5, 6). They were accepting bribes and turning away<sup>27</sup> the poor at the gate, not giving them access to counsel (5:12). Through Micah, Jehovah portrayed the heads of Israel treating the people like meat to be chopped up, cooked and eaten (Micah 3:1-3). Isaiah charged some in Israel of taking advantage of the poor and working to make a spoil from widows (Isaiah 10:1-2; 1:23). Apparently they shed the blood of the poor by making false charges against them, perhaps like Jezebel and Ahab's plot against Naboth (Jeremiah 2:34; 1 Kings 21). The actions of Israel extended to bribes and blood shed all for the sake of gain by violence<sup>28</sup> (Ezekiel 22:7-12). Following Judah's return from the Babylonian exile, as the Old Testament closed, God charged some in Judah of oppressing the wage earner, widow and orphan (Malachi 3:6). Such people abhorred justice. The heads of Judah gave judgments for a bribe (Malachi 3:11). This ranked high among the reasons God approached and will approach Israel in judgment (Malachi 3:1-2).

Yet when Israel first prepared to enter the land, God warned them of the deception which wealth brings (Deuteronomy 8:11-17). Several times God warned Israel of forgetting Him and His covenant with them. People who become wealthy have a tendency to forget that it comes from God. They attribute the wealth or gaining of wealth to themselves or to sources other than God. Gomer, the wife of Hosea, exemplified this attitude. Like Israel, she acquired her wealth from her husband: Gomer from Hosea; Israel from God. Gomer turned to acting as a prostitute and attributed her wealth to her prostitution rather than her husband (Hosea 4:12-14). Israel prostituted herself to other gods and attributed her God-given wealth to these false gods (Hosea 2:8-9). Israel allowed her God-given prosperity to lead her astray.

How did Israel, a God-ordained nation with a divinely given law, devolve into this mess: social classes, oppression of the lower classes by those in power? Certainly Israel's unrighteousness extended beyond these issue, but the prophets regularly cited these failures as breaches of God's law or covenant. Israel abandoned God and turned to idols. As Gomer forgot her true husband, Israel forgot her God.

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<sup>26</sup> Qal Imperfect and Qal Infinitive of נתן to give, to intensify the idea of giving.

<sup>27</sup> The Hiphil stem of the verb נטה [nata] could mean "cause to send away" though the normal meaning is to stretch out. For this reason, the alternate translation of "pervert" may make more sense, and still does justice the thought.

<sup>28</sup> The Piel stem of בצע is a cutting off, by context, for gain. John Oswalt suggests it may have the idea of taking a cut from others' profits like a racketeer. (TWOT, op. cit). As the word is often applied to persons in position of power, it may carry the idea of cutting off from access to justice, which such persons were to maintain. The Qal stem occurs with the noun in Ezekiel 22:27, "to extort for the gain of extortion" or "to cut off, for the profit from cutting off."

### **The law promised material blessings for obedience to the Law.**

Interpreted selectively, ignoring passages which specifically addressed an Israeli's response to the poor and especially warning him against abuse of the poor, some had twisted the Law in their favor. It would be easy to suggest that since obedience brought blessing and disobedience brought cursing, the state of the widow, orphan or other poor was due to their own disobedience. If the powerful could get away with taking advantage of the poor, then it was further proof they were obedient and being blessed and the poor were losing due to their disobedience. Whether this was exactly the scenario, Paul's warning to Timothy of law-teachers included the charge that they equated godliness with gain or a means of gain (1 Timothy 6:5). This indicates that people thought of wealth as a sign of how much they honored God, and that honoring God was a means of gaining wealth.

### **Understanding the Gospel context**

On this background of a socially, economically and religiously twisted Jewish people, Jesus presented Himself as Israel's Messiah. The Old Testament remained.<sup>29</sup> Priests, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes comprised Israel's religious leadership. Whatever practical and doctrinal differences existed among them, all four groups formed an elite aristocratic religious part of Jewish society.

Jesus found the works of the religious leaders to be malignant regarding the people. Matthew 23 records Jesus' indictments against the leaders. They placed heavy burdens on men, but themselves had nothing to do with the burdens (v. 4). In many ways they loved to receive honor (vv. 5-7). They shut off the kingdom from the heavens from the people and wouldn't enter it themselves (v. 13). They went great distances to make proselytes who would only turn out twice the son of gehenna as they were, indicating they were destined for gehenna, and their proselytes would go beyond them in their actions (v. 15). They acted as blind guides (vv. 16-22). They diligently tithed of their small spices while neglecting significant issues: justice, mercy and faithfulness (v. 23). They worried about cleaning the outside of the cup but inside, they were full of robbery and no self-control (v. 25). They were like outwardly neat graves, filled inside with hypocrisy and lawlessness (vv. 27-28). Note especially among these charges their neglect of justice and mercy, their fullness of robbery, and their hypocrisy. In all these the religious leaders demonstrated failures regarding the poor, widows, and orphans.

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<sup>29</sup> Some distinguish the Judaism of Jesus' day from that of the earlier Old Testament socio-religious structure. They identify the five hundred years of the Old Testament as Second Temple Judaism.

**Emphasis in Luke**

All the three synoptic gospels use terms for wealth and need. However, Luke gives greater emphasis to these ideas. The following chart illustrates the concentration of terms (by family) in Luke.

<b>Word family</b>	<b>Occurrences in Matthew</b>	<b>Occurrences in Mark</b>	<b>Occurrences in Luke</b>
<i>ploutos</i> πλουτος rich	4	3	14
<i>matonas</i> μαμονας wealth/possessions	1		3
<i>chrana</i> χρημα property	1		1
<i>Bios</i> βιος life, i.e. things for	1		5
<i>huparcho</i> υπαρχω possessions	3		9/15
<i>ptaomai</i> κταομαι property	1		2
<i>diadidomi</i> διαδιδομι distribute			2
<i>chreia</i> χρεια need	6	4	7
<i>ptokos</i> πτωκος poor	5	5	10

Luke alone records Jesus' charge to not take the prominent seats when invited to a wedding party (Luke 14:7-11). He records also Jesus' charge to to invite people to lunch or dinner who were unable to repay the invitation, that is the poor, crippled, lame and blind (14:12-14). He alone tell us of Jesus' account of the manager who squandered (scattered about) his masters possession (Luke 16:1-9). His point regarded the use of wealth to make friends by being generous, as opposed to the religious leaders who used wealth for financial and class security. Jesus clarified that it wasn't necessary to have much in order to accomplish this, but being faithful with little was significant (16:10). Verse thirteen appears to bring the account to its larger point, you can't have two masters. Therefore, Jesus encouraged them to use their wealth, or little, rather than serving it like a slave. Luke tells us that the Pharisees existed as those fond of money, and they really mocked Jesus for these words (16:14). Jesus responded that the Pharisees justified themselves before men. The very wealth they prized was an abomination to God (16:15). This lead to the account of the rich man and Lazarus.

Luke is the only gospel which records Jesus' account (historical) of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31). Nothing in the account involves matters of faith/believing and righteousness. It serves simply to contrast one who lived in luxury with disregard to the poor man at his door and the poor man himself. Jesus certainly did not intend to say the rich go to

torment because they are rich and the poor find rest due to their poverty. Salvation is by faith and not social status. However, in keeping with the Old Testament revelation and the immediate context, this account contrasts the outward expression of the heart. He just explained that God knows the heart despite man's self-justification (16:15). He smashed the self-assurance of the religious leaders by showing that a wealthy man could fail to reach Paradise/Abraham's Bosom and the poor man could.

All three synoptic gospels record some parable of seed and soils. Each parable illustrates different receptions of Jesus' teaching on the kingdoms (Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:19; Luke 8:14). All three relate that the thorny soil represented individuals who were fruitless as they were choked by the cares (Matthew and Mark add "age") and the deceitfulness (omitted by Luke) of riches. Luke adds that these are also choked by the pleasures of this life [*bios*]. The word pleasures is *ἡδονή* [*hedone*] and usually has a bad connotation as of selfish wanton pleasure, and always occurs negatively in Scripture.<sup>30</sup> Jesus was explaining to His disciples, that while many heard the message and many would even respond (three out of four soils), only one in three would go on to fruitfulness. Those choked by riches or the deceitfulness of riches would not go on for that very reason. Instead of following Jesus as He went about, the riches would distract them. Perhaps in contrast to Levi who left his tables, or Peter, Andrew, James and John who left their boats and nets, these would not leave all.

All three gospels record Jesus' indictment of the religious leaders taking advantage of widows. "Who eat up widow' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers" (Luke 20:47; Mark 12:40). J. Duncan M. Derrett asserts that the men made long prayers to demonstrate their piety, so as to assure their continued positions as trustees of widows' estates. This allowed them access to the estates from which they fed themselves, misappropriating the widow's possessions for themselves. "...trustees and guardians, who were constantly suspect of misappropriation of others' property, and who obtained the facility to misappropriate it only through their public reputation for piety."<sup>31</sup> In this way, they passed themselves off as law-keeping protectors, but only embezzled from the very property they were to protect.

Jesus stated that it was hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God (Matthew 19:22-24; Mark 10:25; Luke 18:25).<sup>32</sup> His disciples' followed with the question, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus responded, "With men this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible" (Matthew 19:25-26). Joseph of Arimathea stands as an example of this case and a contrast to many of the rich mentioned in the gospels. Joseph was a rich man and yet a disciple of Jesus (Matthew 27:57). This can only be accounted for by assuming Joseph related to his wealth differently than others. Likewise, Zaccheus responded to Jesus' message. He not only returned all he had taken by false accusations but returned four times as much (Luke 19:2, 8). In contrast

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<sup>30</sup> F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) 86.

<sup>31</sup> J. Duncan M. Derrett, *Studies in the New Testament: Glimpses of the Legal and Social Presuppositions of the Authors* Vol. 1, (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1977) 124-125.

<sup>32</sup> This was in response to a rich man who could not give away his wealth to follow Jesus and left in grief. Though this man was likely an Old Testament believer, he desired eternal life, a promise which Jesus offered. Jesus was not requiring works for salvation. Rather, people would receive eternal life in the coming age (cf. Mark 10:30). Becoming a disciple of Jesus was a guarantee of living into that coming age at which time one could receive eternal life. If the man was indeed an Old Testament believer, then he will have to wait to receive eternal life in the resurrection (cf. Daniel 12:2; John 5:29).

to the rich, Jesus called the two lepta of the poor working<sup>33</sup> widow “more” compared than all the rich were putting in the temple box (Luke 21:1-4). The rich gave from their abundance or overflow, while the widow gave from her lack, her deficiency. Jesus stated that she gave all her life [*bios*] or livelihood (v. 4). While they gave and had much left over, after she gave her two lepta, she had nothing with which to purchase necessities such as food.

All three synoptics give some account of Jesus’ words, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let Him deny himself, and take up his cross and let him follow Me” (Matthew 16:24). Luke explains that the taking up of one’s cross involves hating one’s father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters and even one’s own life (Luke 14:26). Abandoning one’s family in order to follow Jesus wherever He went would have been considered hate. The stigma of such an action was equated to a death sentence, carrying one’s cross. Matthew and Mark record Jesus’ elaboration on an individual’s life, “Whoever, desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life on account of Me, will find it” (Matthew 16:25). Jesus used the word *psuche* [ψυχή] which is commonly translated “soul.” The *psuche* often describes an individual’s higher life, that is, his aspirations, plans, desires and all that is encompassed within that aspect of life. It is contrasted to *bios* which is strictly the physical life requiring food and covering (cf. 1 Timothy 6:8; James 2:16) and *zoe* [ζωή] which is related to God, the latter being used of eternal life. While it is possible that Jesus’ words were about the worthlessness of property when one dies physically, it seems better in the context that He meant one’s plans and aspirations. In this vein, Jesus was promising His disciples that they would gain a certain quality of life if they gave up their life, consisting of family and possessions, to become His disciple. Thus His famous words, “What does it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his life” (Matthew 16:26)? A man would give practically anything to maintain his goals, desires, and family. Possessions play a role in one’s attitude in these contexts. The coming kingdom would involve a superior quality of life to anything one might have tried to maintain at that time.

Jesus required these men to give up everything to be a disciple because He was announcing a kingdom in which prosperity would be the norm. All needs would be met. However, the meeting of the needs was not to be their primary focus. People who listened to him worried about their clothing and food (Matthew 7:25). Jesus reminded His listeners that their Father knew they needed these things (Matthew 7:32). Rather than worry about those things, they were to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness and then God would add those other benefits to them (Matthew 7:33). If they were in the kingdom of God, the kingdom in which men are saved, they would also enter the kingdom from the heavens, the kingdom in which God rules over the earth through the heavens or spirit beings. In the kingdom from the heavens which Jesus promised, they will have these needs met. Yet in the context, Jesus plainly stated that the physical needs were less significant than their spiritual needs, salvation in the kingdom of God. For this reason, His disciples, His students should be the first to recognize that holding on to earthly wealth and status is meaningless if one is looking forward to the kingdom from the heavens in which Christ will rule as King.

### **Daniel’s 70th week and possessions**

This idea of giving up one’s life for discipleship and the kingdom will also apply during Daniel’s seventieth week. During those seven years, God will purge from among the flock of Israel the rebels. At the end of that time, God will judge the nation of Israel. Jesus pictured that

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<sup>33</sup> The adjective *πεινηρος* derives from *πεινης* a poor laborer. Therefore, this woman was not living off the charity of others, but was earning what she could from her own labors. See G. Abbott-Smith, „ 352-353.

judgment in terms of a landowner/master and his slaves (Matthew 25:14-30). Those slaves are all entrusted with an amount of silver. A talent was equivalent in value to about 75 pounds of silver. Calculating from this, each slave is given a considerable amount of money. Two use their money and one does not. The point of Jesus' parable was that His people were to make proper use of their resources during His absence. The slave that did not use the money His master entrusted to him is cast outside into outer darkness, testimony that he was not a believer. His failure to use what was given merely testified to his unbelieving state.

This parable of the slaves, told about the Jews, parallels Jesus' description of His judgment of the Gentiles: sheep and goats (Matthew 25:31-46). After dealing with His Jewish people, the Lord will come in His glory and judge the Gentiles. They are pictured as sheep and goats being separated. The criteria of judgment includes how these people used their property towards the Jews—the least of these My brothers—during Daniel's seventieth week (vv. 40, 45). The last half of Daniel's seventieth week, is called the Great Tribulation. God's wrath upon the earth intensifies three fold: trumpets, thunders, bowls. God will divinely provide for and protect most of the nation of Israel during this time in place He has prepared for them (Revelation 12:14). However, before that last half begins, God seals 144,000 Jews to circulate in the world as witnesses. They are "the rest of her seed" in Revelation 12:17. Though they are protected by a seal from God's wrath, like others in the world they will suffer from the scarcity of food and potable water. Their clothes will wear to rags. These men will circulate through the world with the message of the kingdom. Some will respond in faith to their message. The distinction between those who believe their message and those who do not is seen in how they use their resources to provide for these men. They feed them when they are hungry and give them water when they are thirsty. In our society with abundance of food and water, this is lost. However, in a time when God's wrath will cause both of these to be scarce, sharing the little one has serves as a great distinction. Both the parable of the slaves and the description of the sheep and goat judgment distinguish believers from unbelievers by their use of earthly possessions.

### **Grace Revelation on Wealth, Possessions, and poverty**

It is interesting that Luke picks up Jesus' teaching on wealth far more than the other synoptic writers and John. Luke had been Paul's companion. He was entrusted by Paul to be left in Philippi indicating that he had enough maturity and understanding of Paul's truth that Paul would trust him to remain behind for the church. This is indicated in Acts by the switch from the "we" or first person plural pronouns, which began in Acts 16 just prior to their going to Philippi, to the "they" or third person plural pronouns. Luke accompanied Paul to Jerusalem and then after his arrest on Paul's trip to Rome while Paul was in chains. This man had the privilege of understanding Paul's NT doctrine for the church. He understood the unique relationship of the church to Christ and the distinction between the Church and Israel. He knew that Jesus' teaching was primarily for Israel. He understood that the free application of Jesus' teaching to the church could both pervert what Jesus meant and alter God's intentions for the church (cf. 1 Timothy 6:3).

Yet Luke wrote an account of Jesus' earthly ministry. He wrote this account nearly thirty years after the Church had begun.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, this gospel is for the Church. It may not teach us how we are to live, but it does include teaching that has implications for the believer.

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<sup>34</sup> Luke visited Jerusalem in AD 57-58 when accompanying Paul. This allowed time for the research behind his account, especially after Paul's arrest and ~2 year incarceration in the Caesarean prison. See also Leon Morris, *Luke*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1974, 1988) 28.



This is the case with Jesus' teaching on wealth and poverty. Israel was given specific instructions for the care of the poor. They were also promised blessings for obedience to the Law. They had abused the blessings, twisted them into an excuse for acquiring wealth and taking advantage of the poor. Those Jewish leaders provide the Church a warning about the neglect of poor believers as well as taking advantage of them. The New Testament letters support the idea that the unrighteous actions of Israel's leaders are still wrong today.

### **A Proper Perspective**

The Church has been given one rule for this present dispensation of grace: love one another as I have you (1 John 13:34). Meeting the needs of other believers with our material resources, our wealth is one way in which we can fulfill this command (1 John 3:16-18). As each dispensation sadly ends in failure, we note that the Church too will fail to fulfill this one command. We will fail to do what is best for our fellow believers. One part of that failure will involve the selfish refusal to use the wealth or possessions God has given us to meet legitimate needs. In Paul's words, "For men will be fond of themselves, fond of money..." (2 Timothy 3:2).

### **Giving from a Proper Perspective**

2 Corinthians eight and nine provide important revelation regarding God's design for giving in this dispensation of grace. Such giving is never to be done out of necessity nor grief. Such giving is to be cheerful and motivated by love. God loves a cheerful giver. Normally when Scripture speaks of God loving, it is in the past tense.<sup>35</sup> This is one of a handful of passages which use the present tense. When a believer gives with this proper attitude, he is using God's kind of love and therefore, God is loving through Him (2 Corinthians 9:7). Giving should be an expression of divinely produced love towards other believers (cf. 1 John 3:16-18). Jesus told His disciples that if they kept His commands (to love) they in turn would be loved by the Father and Son, and the Son would love the believer by manifesting (making plainly visible) Himself to the believer (John 14:21). He manifests Himself through the love the believer directs to other believers' needs.

While love is the motive for proper giving according to 2 Corinthians 9:7, part of the reason for giving is to provide an equality among the body of Christ (2 Corinthians 8:13). Paul stated that the Corinthian saints had an abundance while others lacked. He viewed this as part of God's plan; their abundance would make up for the others' lack and at some future time the tables might be turned (v. 14). This is similar to the statement in the Law that there would be no poor but the poor would be among them. God would allow some to have and some to lack so that an opportunity to give would be afforded the saints. This would be an opportunity to fulfill the new commandment.

Paul praised the Macedonian believers for their generosity even though they were very poor, and in this way shamed the wealthy Corinthian church which was hesitating to help those in need (2 Corinthians 8:1-5, 24). He encouraged Gentile believers to be generous toward the believing Jews (Romans 15:25-27). Paul encouraged Timothy and others to avoid chasing after riches (1 Timothy 6:7-11). He was concerned that the rich should not trust in their riches, which are uncertain, but to be generous in good works, implying at least in part that they use their wealth for other believers (1 Timothy 6:17-18). John also encouraged his readers to love by using their possessions which are necessary for physical life, to meet the needs of believers

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<sup>35</sup> God's love often looks back at the sending of His Son or the death of His Son. This is because with God love is not a feeling but an attitude which is expressed through an action.

who did not have the necessities of life (1 John 3:17-18). His summary charge was “let us love not love by means of word or tongue, but by means of works and in the sphere of truth.” The last word “truth” points to a genuine love. A believer might learn what Christian love looks like, and imitates that love without it being genuine. While God desires the action, He also desires that proper motivation behind the action.<sup>36</sup>

In the church, the rich can have an appropriate view of their wealth. When the Church began, the believers were sharing their material wealth with one another to assure that no one was in need (Acts 2:45). Their attitude toward their property was such that no one said his property was his own (Acts 4:34-35). As pointed out in the introduction, Christ gave no specific instruction for the Church to share their wealth in this manner. Christ’s new command in John 13:34-35 may account for this attitude. The Church was holding firmly to the apostles’ practical doctrine, which would have included this new command (Acts 2:42). It is evident that to some degree they were fulfilling the new command to love.

In Acts 3:20, Peter’s statement, “that the times of refreshment might come from the presence of the Lord and that He may send to you Christ Jesus” evinced the believers’ hope that Christ was coming back to set up His kingdom immediately. They did not yet understand that they were this new Church, or that they were distinct from Israel with a whole new basis and way of life. Because they anticipated the kingdom, the selling and sharing of possessions reflected Christ’s previous instructions to His disciples to sell and give to the poor. Though the Church in Acts 2-6<sup>37</sup> may not have been anticipating the rapture of the Church but Christ’s return as King, their anticipation affected their attitude toward possessions.

In a similar way, the truth of our Lord’s soon return for us (not as King) affects our attitude toward possessions. While addressing the Corinthians regarding issues of marriage and earthly standing, Paul pointed out the brevity of this present situation (1 Corinthians 7:29). Buying and having possessions is part of this brief existence (v. 30). Therefore, those who buy should not act as though they possess. The verb possess [*katecho* **κατέχω**] means to “*hold fast...lay hold of, get possession of... to hold back, detain.*”<sup>38</sup> Whatever the nuance in various contexts, the base idea is a firm hold or position with respect to something or someone else. Therefore, once a believer purchases an item, he is not to hold it (metaphorically) so tightly that his life becomes bound to it or he becomes distracted from the brevity of this life and the soon return of our Lord for His saints.

Possessions are part of this present world. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul further reminded his readers, that they could make use of the world system, but were not to fully use it (v. 31). The scenery, the outward form of this present world system is passing away. It is transitory. What

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<sup>36</sup> This calls to mind Paul’s encouragement at the end of 1 Corinthians (15:58) that your exhausting labor in the Lord is not without content. Of the three words meaning “vain” this word emphasizes the content. It does not consider the goal, or the outcome. God sets the goal, and He gives the increase. The only part which the believer can accomplish is have the proper content-motivation.

<sup>37</sup> It is not clear at what point the Church changed its perspective from Christ’s return to set up the kingdom and Christ’s coming in the air for His Church. 1 Thessalonians contains the first clear references in New Testament writings, being written about AD 51 to early 52. The letter indicates that Paul had taught on the subject but did not have enough time to clarify certain issues, such as: what happens to those believers who have died? Jesus had revealed a return to come and take His own to be where He is (John 14:1-6). Yet the early chapters of Acts indicate that they did not understand this to be distinct from His coming to establish the kingdom.

<sup>38</sup> Abbott-Smith, ,. 241.

is popular today, next year will fill Goodwill's shelves. This world is transitory. The purchases in this world system are transitory. To hold fast to these things, or to make full use of things in this system, is to tie one's life to the temporal. Remember Paul's words to Timothy, "We carried nothing into this world, and we are able to carry nothing out of it" (1 Timothy 6:7). The believer should always remember this time is short for our Lord comes for us soon.

### **Giving and Widows**

In Acts 6 we find that the Church was attending to the needs of widows. This was the basis of choosing the first deacons who oversaw the distribution of the Church's collected wealth to meet the needs of widows. Nearly thirty years later, Paul wrote to Timothy and laid down some regulations on the Church's responsibility to widows. Among those is the qualification, "have hoped upon God, and continuing in the supplications and the worships" (1 Timothy 5:5). The Church, as a group, an organization, a whole, does not have a responsibility to provide for unsaved widows. In fact, unsaved widows do not qualify for the Church's provisions. James reminded his readers that pure and undefiled religion (outward service to a deity/God) involved the oversight [AV visit] of orphans and widows (James 1:27). The verb *επισκεπτομαι* involves not only overseeing or visiting but attending to the needs present. It is a responsibility of the Church to care for those who have no means of caring for themselves.

While the Church is responsible for the care of widows, an individual believer having a believing widow, whether mother or aunt, has the first responsibility to provide for her (1 Timothy 5:3). This act can be a God-honoring act (godliness). Paul mentioned a handful of activities which fall within the sphere of godliness. None are spectacularly religious. Yet providing for a widowed relative can honor God by manifesting what He has given us in salvation.

### **Giving and Needs of the Brothers**

Believers in Judea became quite needy for various reasons: alienation by fellow Jews, loss or seizure of property, and famine (Hebrews 10:34; Acts 11:28). Believers outside Judea, including Gentile believers, determined to meet that need. Paul frequently referenced this need and the gifts to provide for those saints (Romans 15:25-26; 1 Corinthians 16:2-3; Galatians 2:10). This was an opportunity for believers to direct love at saints, members of the body of Christ, whom they may never have met during this life.

God revealed a balance even within the Churches regarding giving to the needs of others. He explained to the Thessalonians that if one did not wish to work he was not to eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Such individuals were out of order, never working, and busybodies (2 Thessalonians 3:11). Simply, those able to work were to work. The Church is not responsible to provide for those who don't wish to work. This does not preclude the Church helping those who work but are unable to make enough to maintain their physical life. It is necessary to determine whether believers have genuine needs. The verb "sees" [*θεωρω*] in 1 John 3:17 is sight that has clear mental apprehension of what one is observing. Therefore, the believer knows with certainty that his brother has a need.

The Church is not to use her resources for the world. We saw this under the limitations for providing for widows. However, the individual believer may. Paul encouraged the Galatian Christians to do good to all men, especially those of the household of the faith (Galatians 6:10). It is plain that believers are to give preferential treatment to believers, but are not to restrict

their good works to believers. The context includes instructions about sharing with those who teach, and sowing and reaping. This leads into the charge to do good, indicating that one aspect of doing good can include some material assistance to unbelievers in addition to the special focus on fellow believers. In Acts 2:44-45 believers sold property and distributed the proceeds to those in need. Those in need are defined in the context by “all the ones believing” (v. 44).<sup>39</sup>

### **Giving, Elders, and Qualifications for Bishops**

Paul warned the Ephesian elders to watch both for fellow bishops and wolves (unbelievers from outside) who would come to take believers for their own (Acts 20:28-30). Paul did not minister because he craved anyone’s silver, gold, or clothes (v. 33). Paul provided for himself and demonstrated that they give their ministry to the weak (probably spiritually) rather than receive, implying doing ministry for remuneration (vv. 34-35). In this context, Paul reminded those elders of Jesus’ words, “It is happier to give than to receive.”

We might also point out that much of the New Testament revelation on giving, wealth and needs does not involve pastoral salaries, missions, and certainly not building facilities and the maintenance of the same. Much of the revelation is about meeting legitimate needs of fellow believers: widows, orphans, those destitute of food and clothing.

Scripture does address provisions for those who serve in leadership capacities of the Church: apostles and elders. Paul indicated to the Corinthians that the other apostles received provisions for their work, or “the authority to not work” indicating that some did not work a secular job, but lived upon the Churches’ provisions (1 Corinthians 9:4-11). The Philippians sent to Paul’s need on more than one occasion (Philippians 4:15-16). However, Paul’s personal habit was not to take assistance from any local assembly while he served that assembly (1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:8; Acts 20:33-35). One of the qualifications for both bishops and deacons is that they not be fond of sordid gain (1 Timothy 3:8; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:2). Bishops are not to be fond of money [lit. fond of silver] (1 Timothy 3:3). Therefore, provision for leaders is proper, but not to be demanded or craved.

John also revealed that believers do not take ministry support from the world (3 John 6-7). For this reason, John encouraged his readers to send such Christian workers on their way with support. Since the world does not provide ministry support, that support must come from believers or from one’s own personal labors. What is true of the individuals is true for the Church. It does not go to the unsaved to raise “funds.” The needs of the Church are to be met by those who make up the Church. They may work within the world and bring from their earnings to the Church, but the Church does not appeal to the world, and probably should not take offered assistance from the world.

### **Contentment and Possessions**

Contentment does not promote growth within the world system. We live in a world which wishes to see increased production, and sales, whether this be cars, houses, clothes or food. To accomplish this, people must spend more to purchase more. This requires the common man to increase his yearly earnings, so that he is able to have more to buy more, so other people can make more and sell more. It fosters a vicious cycle.

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<sup>39</sup> The Dative adjective *pasin* [πᾶσιν] functioning as a pronoun has the Nominative articular participle οἱ πιστευόντες as its antecedent.

Contentment is the proper attitude for the Grace believer. Paul encouraged the Hebrew believers to have no fondness for money [silver] as their way of life (Hebrews 13:5). In fact, contentment with what one has [the present things] is better (v. 5). Paul did not say: content because your situation is good, but rather: content with the present things. Therefore, when one has much, it is enough. When one has less, it is enough. When one has even less, it is enough. If one remembers that our Lord will never leave or abandon us, how much more does one need? The base idea of “content” is “warding off.”<sup>40</sup> It appears that it wards off the need or lure of finding one’s fulfillment in something other than what God has present provided. What God allows one to have at any given time, is enough. God knows it is enough, and the believer should see that it is enough. Though the Philippians had sent to Paul’s need, he clarified for them that he had learned to be content in any situation (Philippians 4:11-12). Such contentment operates in abundance or lack. Paul used a verbal form of the word mystery which our English Bibles translate “have learned.” The idea is that Paul was “sharing a secret he had learned: be content in every situation.” What a novel secret! He applied that secret to believer when he told Timothy that if one is able to eat and cover himself, he should be content (1 Timothy 6:8).

### **Warnings About Improper Attitudes**

Too often Christian leaders are viewed as greedy leeches. This is well founded on the example of unbelievers who pretend at being believing leaders. The enemies of the cross have their bellies as their god (Philippians 3:18-19). Some of the false teachers taught for the very sake of gain (Titus 1:11). Both bishops and deacons must not be interested in gain at any cost (Titus 1:7; 1 Timothy 3:8). The AV translated this word “filthy lucre” and the NASB “sordid gain.” The idea is gain that is shameful,<sup>41</sup> or in modern terms, one would be embarrassed to admit how he acquired that gain: cheating, stealing, taking it under false pretenses, taking it from a questionable source.<sup>42</sup> Paul warned Timothy of a coming time (for Timothy) when fondness for money would be common character of those in the Church (2 Timothy 3:2). Paul contrasted himself to some who were already handling God’s Word like a dishonest peddlers (2 Corinthians 2:17). These serve to warn not only the Church, but leaders in particular of giving any weight to this charge against themselves.

Greed is an expression of certain works of the flesh, specifically idolatry (cf. Ephesians 4:19; 5:3, 5). The Greek word translated greed is *pleonexia* [πλεονεξία] which literally meant to “have more.”<sup>43</sup> Greed is the craving for more. Therefore, a greedy person makes an idol of more of whatever he craves. A person characterized by greed does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). The point suggests: why should believers act like those who do not share in our inheritance? Believers are to avoid mingling or mixing it up with any who call or identify themselves as brothers but act like a greedy person (1 Corinthians 5:9-11).

The main issue in the book of James involves a question of whether his readers will do God’s will or pursue the reacquisition of their lost wealth/possessions. They needed to know

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<sup>40</sup> Abbott-Smith, ,, 59.

<sup>41</sup> Abbott-Smith, ,, 13.

<sup>42</sup> An example friends shared with me involved a seminary refusing a sizable donation from the honor of a betting track. I’ve had to refuse “ministry” assistance from plainly unorthodox religious groups.

<sup>43</sup> Abbott-Smith, ,, 364.

that the rich man will fade just as others (James 1:11). Some were showing favor to the rich and treating rudely the poor (James 2:1-7). Some were failing to live by faith, withholding help for poor brothers and sisters (James 2:14-17). Some had begun loving [being friends/φιλος] the world (James 4:1-3). Some had planned to set up business in another city, without considering whether it was God's will (James 4:13-17). He castigated the rich for their mistreatment of their works and the poor (James 5:1-6).

Some of the believers in the city of Corinth were enamored with earthly, worldly prestige. They were impressed by scholarship, philosophy, and debate. They liked the wise, powerful, and noble (1 Corinthians 1:26). The wise were people of intellect, The powerful were people of influence and the noble people born into prominent families.<sup>44</sup> Paul reminded the Corinthian saints that God has not chosen many from these groups (1 Corinthians 1:26). "Why?" we ask. Paul explained that God has done this so that He might put to shame those in the world who are wise, powerful, and noble so that no one can boast before God (vv. 27-29). Many who are wise, powerful and noble think that they do not need God; that if there is a God, that God should honor or respect them for what they have made of themselves. They are somebodies, and they think that somebodies can demand God's attention. That is their boast, but not before God! God will not stand for it. God will use those who are not wise, not powerful, and not of noble birth to demonstrate that He can accomplish great things through the nobodies, that He does not need somebodies to get His work done. This puts the glory back on God, not man.

This is a vital aspect of relating to wealth. God doesn't need our wealth. As the sage and psalmists wrote, if a righteous man is wealthy, his wealth has been given by God. If one has wealth, and recognizes that it is from God, he will not boast in it. He will trust in God and not his wealth. He will be rich in good works as opposed to hoarding his wealth for his own sense of well-being. He will recognize that his wealth does not distinguish him within the body of Christ. He will see that he is no more significant than any other member of the body of Christ.

The letters to the seven Churches in Revelation two and three address two areas of wealth and possessions. The first Church addressed, Ephesus, stood firmly in its doctrine (2:3-3). Perhaps it resembled solid modern Fundamental Evangelical assemblies. Yet it had left its first love, a love which was to be directed first to "one another" (2:4). Jesus did not elaborate on exactly how they had left this. John, who took down this letter as a dictation from the Lord Himself, also wrote 1 John in which, as we've seen above, the Church loves by providing for other believers. This lack of love was a fault of the Church. The last of the seven Churches, Laodecia, the democratic Church, received no commendation from the Lord, but only criticism. It appears to be a church in name only, having no believers in the assembly as Christ stands on the outside (3:20). To the point of our theme, this Church was enriched and increased and claimed it had no need (3:17). It was a group of unbelievers assembled and going through the motions of "Christian religious activities." This group was unaware of her desperate state, assuring herself by focusing on her material wealth. Material wealth tells nothing about the spiritual condition of a Church. A church materially rich can not be said to be functioning properly or improperly, and the same can be said of a materially poor church.

### **Comparing Old Testament and Gospels to the New Testament**

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<sup>44</sup> For these definitions, see Robert G. Gromacki, *Called to Be Saints*, 22.

Many New Testament statements and warnings regarding wealth and possessions echo those in the Old Testament and the Gospels. While many distinctions exist between the dispensation of Law and that of Grace, many similarities also exist: proper attitudes on possessions, God as the source of wealth, proper use of possessions, generosity. People should not invest their life in their possessions. The Old Testament motivation was love for God and love for others as one loves himself. The New Testament motivation is also love but on a much higher level: as Christ loved us. In these the two agree.

Both dispensations also involve distinctions. Obedience under the Law brought material blessings while disobedience brought material devastation. Neither is promised to the believer under Grace. Under the Law, material prosperity could legitimately testify to Israel's obedience, while lack or devastation evidenced Israel's disobedience. Under Grace, one may have abundance or lack and neither speaks to one's character. Grace is defined by contentment or finding sufficiency in God despite outward circumstances. Israel was a nation of saved and unsaved individuals, and generosity was to be extended to both alike. The Church is an organism of only saved individuals, and the Church directs its generosity only to believers. Though not the focus of this paper, part of the provision for the poor in Israel consisted of a tithe every third year. The Church is given no set amount for giving. While Israelis received Biblical warning about foolishness in the areas of money and work, the individual Israeli was not to close his hand to his fellow Israeli in need. In the Church, believers are charged to work, to give, but not to give to those who did not want to work. This adds a level of discernment.

Ignoring or misunderstanding the distinctions while only looking at the similarities results in the charges cited at the beginning of this paper. The Church is not called to change the world, culture, or to fix its problems. The Church is called out of the nations to be something distinct. It is a testimony to the Word and plan of God by how it lives. In this way, it bears similarity to Israel. It was a nation separated from the nations. God gave it laws to make it different than the other nations, and in this way to be a testimony to about God in the world. So the Church, by her unique love to one another within the Church, is to be a testimony to the world.

When the Church delves into the world to address poverty within the system, or to address issues of property and possessions within the system, it loses its focus. These are to be addressed within the Church as believers direct love to one another. The world on the outside, observes believers loving one another and experientially comes to know that we are Christ's disciples (John 13:34-35). They know it experientially, because what they observe they can relate to in their experience by contrast, and they know it is not what they do! Their "love" is always motivated by selfish ambition (Romans 2:8). The Church needs to heed her command.

This leaves the Church with the "uneasy conscience" issue as Henry called it. How does the Church look at and respond to these problems in the world system? As individuals, we can do good to those who have genuine needs. We do not, however, do so at the deprivation of believers. We also need to remind ourselves that this system is always in flux and is passing away. It is Satan's system and can not be fixed. The believer is not to love the system (1 John 2:15ff). Therefore, his acts of goodness towards those in that system will always be moderate. He will remind himself that this system is not only the enemy of our Lord, but also of those who are the Lord's (John 15:18-21). It will not surprise him that having fed the dog, the dog then bites his hand. In the end, the Church's testimony is not found in what we do for those in the system but for those in the Church. Those in the world are not won to salvation by our

“acts of love” toward it, but by the proclamation of the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:21). This is how God is pleased to save those who believe. Human sentiment, philosophy, or observation might move Christians to attempt reaching people by other means. Yet our means are defined by God’s Word, not human musings. God’s Word dictates our response to this system. Aligning our thinking with God’s Word, we might have to override an uneasy conscience, messed up by faulty thinking.

### **Genuine Riches and Spiritual Poverty**

A brief encouragement of the Scriptures’ teaching on true riches seems fitting at the close of this study. This study has focused on a proper perspective concerning physical, earthly, wealth and possessions. Yet, the New Testament takes these terms and uses them with genuine spiritual emphases. Jesus acquired believers as possessions by the price of His own blood (Acts 20:28). God has acted and continues to act toward the believer richly.

2 Corinthians 8:9 illuminates spiritual riches and poverty by the illustration of Jesus Christ. As mentioned above, chapters eight and nine addressing giving. The Corinthians had previously planned or promised to give something to aid the Jewish Christians in Judea. To encourage them to make good on their intentions, Paul pointed out the Lord’s grace by becoming poor so we might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). Paul likely did not mean physical poverty but spiritual, emphasizing not only the Son’s emptying Himself and taking the form of a slave, but His spiritual separation on the cross. Similarly, our becoming rich is not about physical wealth, but the abundant spiritual benefits of salvation.

The word rich [*plousios*] and its cognates occur several times Ephesians. Redemption and forgiveness are measured by the standard of the riches of God’s grace (Ephesians 1:7). Recall that the root behind this word family meant “‘to flow’... connected to ‘to fill.’ The basic sense, then, is ‘fullness of goods.’”<sup>45</sup> The idea of riches in these contexts indicate that first, God has an abundance and second, God extends that abundance toward the believer. We might say that He doesn’t extend us a nickel’s worth of grace with the charge to not spend it all in one place.

In Ephesians 1:18 Paul expressed his wish that the Ephesians hearts would be enlightened to know, among other things, “what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.” I take glory to be a Genitive of description: riches consisting of or characterized by the glory. In this context glory is the reputation side of God’s opinion. Therefore, this is riches which consist of God’s reputation or expressed self-opinion. In verse 11 Paul stated that we were made an inheritance,<sup>46</sup> that is we are part of Christ’s inheritance. It is to this inheritance that Paul refers in verse 18. The inheritance is also a Genitive noun, in this case a Genitive of Apposition related to glory. Paul’s point is that God has expressed His reputation to be generous and that generosity also consists of His inheritance. The saints on whom God has showered the present benefits of salvation all stand as expressions of how generous God has been.

Though we were dead through our offensive thoughts and actions and our sins, God was rich in mercy towards us (Ephesians 2:4). Mercy is an expression of God’s attributes of goodness and love in which He pities those suffering as a result of sin (theirs or others’). By

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<sup>45</sup> F. Hauck and W. Kasch, “wealth, riches” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans., abr. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), 873-876.

<sup>46</sup> The verb is an Aorist Passive rather than an Active. The verb κληροῶ occurs only in Ephesians 1:11.



mercy, God acts to relieve that suffering. In this context, His mercy is expressed generously by making us jointly<sup>47</sup> alive with Christ, jointly raising us, and jointly seating us in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus (vv. 5-6). These joint benefits in Christ contrasted to our previously dead state demonstrate just how rich or generous God has been to the us.

In future ages, God will use the Church to display how abundant are His riches consisting of grace expressed by kindness (Ephesians 2:7). His kindness puts others at ease in His presence and makes God approachable. This is the absolute, one-and-only God of the universe, and He makes Himself approachable to us. That abundant riches of His grace.

The unity of the body of Christ, both positionally and actually, are grounded in who we are in Christ. That unity is grounded upon equal benefits and standing: joint-heirs, joint-members of the body, joint partakers of the promise (singular) in Christ (Ephesians 3:6). For the Gentile believers to learn and know that they stand in respect to God and His plan exactly as do Jewish believers comprises unfathomable riches of the Christ (Ephesians 3:8). No Gentile had ever had such a standing before God as those who are joint members of this one body in Christ, a reality unique to this present dispensation (Ephesians 3:9-10).

This unity can be worked out practically as believers grasp the full dimensions of the body of Christ, rather than limiting it to those like themselves such as Jews to Jews (Ephesians 3:18). This involves the Christ (the Head and Body as one) settling down in believers' hearts (v. 17). The believer needs to be rooted and have a firm foundation in love. When believers see how big the body is, they can have love for the Christ, not just for those believers who have a common background. This requires strength in the inner man. No believer is capable of rightly relating to the body apart from this inner mental strength (3:16). God provides the strength generously, "that He would give to you measured by the standard of the riches of His reputation, to be made visibly strong by power through His Spirit in the inner man."

Like the Ephesian church, the Philippians church also had an issue involving unity. The struggle revolved around how believers served both in communicating the gospel to the world and ministering to one another. In 4:19 Paul encouraged them that God would fill up all their needs measured by the standard of His riches in opinion in Christ Jesus. Their need was to get along with one another. That need could be filled as they operated in Christ Jesus. As in the other passages God generously provides for meeting this need.

The Colossian church also had a need of unity based on proper truth and perspective of the body of Christ. Paul had a great struggle so their hearts would be encouraged (Colossians 2:1-2). This would be accomplished by their hearts being knit together by love and because of<sup>48</sup> all the riches which come from the understanding, because of a full-experiential knowledge regarding the mystery of God the Father and the Christ. In this passage, riches refers not to God's generosity but to the rich benefit one derives from the full assurance

We saw earlier that many Hebrew saints had their possessions seized (Hebrews 10:34). Those saints were able to welcome<sup>49</sup> this seizure with joy. What seems like a strange response to the seizure or property is explained by the last phrase, "Knowing you have a better and

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<sup>47</sup> The  $\sigma\upsilon\nu$  prefixed preposition emphasizes the united position shared by believers in Christ.

<sup>48</sup> This is a causal use of  $\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ .

<sup>49</sup> An Aorist Middle Indicative of  $\pi\rho\sigma\delta\epsilon\chi\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$  [*prosdechomai*].

continuing possession [ὑπαρξις].” Believers have a possession which can not be stolen, seized or marred on earth. Such knowledge can and should affect the believer’s attitude toward his earthly possessions and how people will treat them.

### **Conclusion**

God has addressed the issues of wealth, possessions, poverty and how people are to respond to each. God gave many specific commands in the Law for the nation of Israel. Because Jesus came to the Israelis who were still under that Law, Jesus addressed many of their failures and misleading aspirations in these spheres. The Church is not Israel and is not under the Law, but the Church does have specific instructions regarding each of these.

Christ gave the Church one chief command, to love one another. He did not command His disciples to love the world. He certainly didn’t command them to fix or attempt to fix the world. The proper use of personal property to address material needs of other believers constitutes a fulfillment of this command. This is a far cry from World Vision and Habitat for Humanity.

Individuals and groups will continue to level charges against the Church on these matters. Some charges may have legitimacy, as churches amass wealth for the wrong reasons. However, many charges fail to distinguish the Church and Israel. Many charges neglect the truth that the Church is not under the Law. Some charges do not see that the Church is called out of the world and is not called to change the world or to rescue the world. This affects how the Church uses its material resources; such resources are intended for believers alone. The Church is not to use its resources for the world. Individual believers are not so restricted but are charged to give priority to fellow believers, a fact neglected when so many direct the majority of the resources and efforts in preference to the unsaved rather than brothers and sisters in Christ. Like many truths, even one’s relationship to possessions and poverty is affected by a literal interpretation of Scripture and the resulting dispensational distinctions.