

There Will Be No Poor Among You

Deuteronomy 15:4-19

In Deuteronomy God is giving the Mosaic Law to Israel. In this chapter we have something of a law of charity. The law is that every seven years all debtors are released from their debts – all debts are forgiven.

A supplement to this law is the mandate for charity (verse 7-10). It is further mandated that this giving will be done with a kind, gracious heart. Without this gracious heart, the giving is a sin. (You can give many examples: stories, testimonies.)

The promise is that if this law and mandate are followed there will be no poor among you. That is: the key to elimination of poverty is giving.

This linking economic prosperity with religious morality. Prosperity does not come through external wealth alone. The ultimate source of prosperity for all is charity, giving, sharing, community. Thus the meaning of community is, in part, the creation of prosperity.

Why is this “religious morality,” and not just “morality”? Because it takes an element of faith to be able to give, without seeing anything in return. On what basis could we expect to forgive their debtors every seven years? It is bad business, from a worldly point of view. That is why one needs faith in God, that such release of debts will eventually prosper the whole. God’s business ethics, in other words, are not man’s business ethics.

An even more radical principle is enunciated concerning the release of slaves: not only should they be released at the seventh year, but they should be given much material gifts at that time (verses 13-14).

Verse 11-a means that the poor will not go away of their own accord. But it is already spoken that if the people obey God and give freely according to the law of release, then poverty will be solved. That is: human beings must take responsibility to resolve the problem of poverty, with trust in God’s business ethics.

The foundation for this ethic is revealed in verse 15: the Lord gave to you, when he redeemed you from slavery in Egypt. Just as God gave to us, then, we should give to others. Then God can bless us, and our society.

Finally, verse 19: give back to God. The commandment to give to each other leads up to the commandment to give to God, to give the best to Him. God is the source of all blessings

(verse 18-b). (Expand upon the principle of horizontal give and take making the base for the vertical blessings of God's grace.)

(And the injunction to give your best to God, not your second best, can be expanded. For example...) Consider the analogy of God as parents, we as children. If you were a parent, and you give a wonderful present to your children, how would you feel if they gave you something second-rate? If they just gave you something they did not value anyway? We should value God above everything else; therefore we should give to God that which we value the most in this world – otherwise it means that we value, say, our prime sheep more than we value our relationship with God.

As a social action plea, giving something material to God is an Old Testament standard. The standard brought by Jesus is to give yourself to God. Therefore, give yourself to the church. Of course, it is good to give a material (money) offering; that is great, but realize that it is the older standard. Best is to give yourself to the church (which means of course giving your money too).