



## Are Poor People Exempt From Giving?

I travel to and minister in a lot in poor areas of the world. The attitude is usually the same every where I go — “We are poor, so you are to give to us.” Whether they are poor or not, this attitude can completely cripple a church in many ways. I would call this a poverty mentality.

The poverty mentality usually goes unrecognized by those taken by it. They are in fact poor and that fact convinces them that they should be given to and that they are exempt from giving. I have seen entire churches stuck in this mentality. There is very little that can be done for a group of people in this state of mind — unless they are willing to change their thinking. Usually, the pastor has reinforced this mentality as he is poor himself.

Yes, we are to help the poor. Jesus gave to the poor regularly. Apparently it was common for Jesus to instruct Judas to give to the poor.

*(John 13:29 KJV) “For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; **or, that he should give something to the poor.**”*

On more than one occasion, Jesus challenged rich people to sell what they had and to give to the poor (Matt. 19:21). Paul told Timothy to “charge” the rich in this age to be “rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share” which would certainly have included giving to the poor. There is no lack of scripture telling us to give to the poor, both Old and New Testaments. I am not advocating forsaking the poor. I am however, going to say that they are not exempt from tithing or giving. Having said this, I hope you will read on.

In the Old Testament, God set up a system that would assure that no one would remain in poverty. It was called the year of Jubilee. Every fiftieth year, debts were canceled and indentured servitudes were released. Things can happen that cause people to fall into debt, and often despair, but God arranged a way out for them. The Bible passages explaining the Jubilee are too many to list here. Here is a synopsis from Easton's Bible Dictionary.

*The advantages of this institution were manifold. "1. It would prevent the accumulation of land on the part of a few to the detriment of the community at large. 2. **It would render it impossible for any one to be born to absolute poverty**, since every one had his hereditary land. 3. It would preclude those inequalities which are produced by extremes of riches and poverty, and which make one man domineer over another. 4. It would utterly do away with slavery. 5. It would afford a fresh opportunity to those who were reduced by adverse circumstances to begin again their career of industry in the patrimony which they had temporarily forfeited. 6. It would periodically rectify the disorders which crept into the state in the course of time, preclude the division of the people into nobles and plebeians, and preserve the theocracy inviolate.*

It is clear that God does not want people to remain in poverty. Many people do not make the connection, but Jesus claimed He was anointed to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, or, the year of Jubilee.

*(Luke 4:18–19 KJV) "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord."*

There is no doubt that prosperity is part of what God wants to bring to His people — in every covenant.

**The question remains:** Are poor people exempt from giving?

One day, Jesus was watching people put money into the offering box.

*(Mark 12:41–44 ESV) "And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his*

*disciples to him and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”*

In the eyes of God, this poor widow gave more than the rich who put in large sums. Jesus could have run over to her and stopped her from giving — but He didn't. This woman was poor **and** a widow, two situations that are extremely difficult. Rather than say that this woman was exempt from giving, Jesus commended her for her giving. This widow's giving was self motivated and something she had decided to do on her own as there was no offering being received like we do in church services. Jesus watches our giving.

Everything has its' time and place.

*(Matthew 26:6–11 ESV) “Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table. And **when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste? For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor.”** But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me.”*

I find this situation to be true very often. Jesus' disciples were “indignant” with the fact that an expensive ointment should be used on Him. In their eyes it was an excess. They apparently thought that they knew how money should be spent and they challenged Jesus for allowing the oil to be put on Him. Many people do not like the preacher to prosper, especially when there are poor people around. But notice, Jesus received the woman's gift and did not sell the oil and give to the poor — on this occasion.

### **The churches of Macedonia.**

Some of the most used scriptures in the New Testament for giving are found in 2Corinthians chapters 8 and 9. It is not often mentioned, but these scriptures were speaking about a group of extremely poor people giving to an excess.

*(2 Corinthians 8:1–5 ESV) “We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and **their extreme poverty** have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. **For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord,** begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.”*

These extremely poor Christians gave beyond their means. Not only did they willingly give, but their giving was not prompted by a request for an offering. They were self-motivated in their giving and actually begged Paul to take their offering to the persecuted saints in Jerusalem. Notice that Paul did not tell them to refrain from giving because they were poor. Paul went on to say:

*(2 Corinthians 8:12 KJV) “For if there be first a willing mind, **it is accepted according to that a man hath,** and not according to that he hath not.”*

Again, in the eyes of God, the amount given is relative to the amount that a person has. This is how the poor widow that Jesus watched in the treasury gave more than the rich people. God accepted her gift according to what she had. Here, Paul is saying the same thing. Some poor people feel that they have so little to give that their giving doesn't matter. Not so in God.

Paul went on to say that these poor people who gave have turned their giving into seed sown.

*(2 Corinthians 9:6–7 ESV) “The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap **bountifully**. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”*

Because of what Paul said in 2Corinthians 8:12 above, the amount that qualifies as “bountifully” is determined by what a person has. Therefore, a poor person that gives all, even though the amount is less, has given more than a rich person that gave out of their abundance. We always think in terms of numbers but God sees things in terms of intention. Poor people need to see that their giving is important. They also need to change their attitude about it.

## Poor people and the tithe.

The tithe is a great equalizer.

*(Leviticus 27:30 ESV) "Every tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the LORD's; it is holy to the LORD."*

The Bible says that "**every tithe**" of the land is the Lords. It makes no distinction between the rich and the poor people. Since the tithe is the first tenth part of an increase, every person can bring the same amount to the Lord. The tithe is a percentage, not an amount. A poor person's tithe in the eyes of God is the same as a rich person's tithe. Again, God's viewpoint is not in a certain amount. Everyone has ten percent of an increase.

## Giving to ministers.

Since I have ministered in forty-five countries in over thirty years on Biblical finances, I have observed patterns of thinking in both rich and poor people. Poor people often do not give to ministers. Many of the poor people actually think that the ministers are to give finances to them.

*(1 Corinthians 9:11 ESV) "If we have sown spiritual things among you, **is it too much** if we reap material things from you?"*

Some think it is too much. You might be surprised to find out how many times there is no offering received for me by the ones I have ministered to. If you are a minister reading this I am sure you are not surprised.

I made an agreement with a minister that our ministry would sponsor a financial convention and the only thing I required was that an offering be received for me. The money was not the issue, it was the principle. Poor people are not exempt from doing what the Bible says to do. If they will give according to their means, God will bless them. The host ministry did receive an offering, but he kept it for his ministry. That ministry will never rise out of poverty and they will likely never understand why.

Jesus gave instructions to His apostles concerning their support before He sent them out.

*(Matthew 10:9–11 ESV) "Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff, **for the laborer deserves his food**. And*

*whatever town or village you enter, **find out who is worthy** in it and stay there until you depart.”*

The reason they were not to take money with them was because they were to be supported by those whom they were ministering to. Jesus expected them to be supported by those whom they were ministering to, and, if they were not supported by them, Jesus told them to depart and shake off the dust of their feet as a testimony against them. He said, “find out who is worthy” and stay there. The person “worthy” is the one that will give to the one ministering to them. That also means that if they will not support them, then they are not worthy to be ministered to any longer. There are people I no longer work with for this reason. My guess is that they probably think that I am being difficult with them, but I am being Biblical. They likely do not see it this way, but Jesus sent an answer to their poverty and they rejected it by their poverty mentality. I see this often.

It is very sad to see that many foreign “mission” works are trained by American pastors to have a poverty mentality. I have worked with many organizations that view the indigenous people as poor people and they don't require offerings to be received for those sent to speak at their conventions etc. They are severely hurting those mission works as they are training them to remain poor because they are not teaching them to honor the ones God sends.

I ministered five years in a row in churches and minister's conventions in Haiti and I can assure you that all it takes to start a church in Haiti is a bag of rice and a light bulb. This is actually how most of the churches began. In the churches I ministered in, the pastor was being paid by a church in the US. The church members had no responsibility toward the minister or the church at all. Its easy to understand why the people remain poor in Haiti.

What I am talking about is an attitude and not an amount of money. If there is not an attitude among the people to give what they have to give, then there is a poverty mentality. Poor people are not exempt from giving.