

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH 1-10-16 PM NOTES  
"HERE WE STAND ON HELPING THE POOR"  
1 JOHN 3:17-18  
# 13 in Series, "Here We Stand"

I. The Bible Speaks to Poverty

A. The Old Testament

**Leviticus 19:9-10 (NASB)** <sup>9</sup> Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. <sup>10</sup> Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the Lord your God."

**Deuteronomy 15:11 (NASB)** "For the poor will never cease *to be* in the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.'"

**Proverbs 14:21 (NASB)** "He who despises his neighbor sins, but happy is he who is gracious to the poor."

**Proverbs 31:20 (NASB)** "She extends her hand to the poor, and she stretches out her hands to the needy."

**Amos 5:11-12 (NASB)** <sup>11</sup> Therefore because you impose heavy rent on the poor and exact a tribute of grain from them, *though* you have built houses of well-hewn stone, yet you will not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, yet you will not drink their wine. <sup>12</sup> For I know your transgressions are many and your sins are great, *you* who distress the righteous *and* accept bribes and turn aside the poor in the gate."

B. The New Testament

**Luke 14:13-14 (NASB)** <sup>13</sup> But when you give a reception, invite *the* poor, *the* crippled, *the* lame, *the* blind, <sup>14</sup> and you will be blessed, since they do not have *the means* to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

**Galatians 2:10 (NASB)** "*They* only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do."

**James 2:15-17 (NASB)** <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that? <sup>17</sup> Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself."

II. A Brief History of the Church and Poverty

"I will not be a party of stealing money from one group of citizens to give to another group of citizens; no matter what the need or the apparent justification. Once the coffers of the federal government are open to the public, there will be no shutting them again...It is the responsibility of the citizens to support their government. It is not the responsibility of the government to support its citizens."  
– President Grover Cleveland (1885-1889, 1893-1897)

### III. The Root Problem That Must Be Addressed

**Romans 10:2 (NASB)** “For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.”

A. A Biblical View of God

B. A Biblical View of Self

C. A Biblical View of Circumstances

**Genesis 50:20 (NASB)** “As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.”

**Romans 8:28-29 (NASB)** “<sup>28</sup> And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren.”

### IV. Stages of Helping the Poor

*When Helping Hurts* by Steve Colbert and Brian Fikkert

- A. Relief—the urgent and temporary provision of emergency aid to reduce immediate suffering from a natural or a man-made crisis
- B. Rehabilitation—longer-term efforts to help restore a person to their “pre-crisis” circumstances
- C. Development—the long-term process of discipling the long-term materially poor so that they are dependent on God alone and with God’s help can meet their need for the basic necessities of life

### V. The Plan to Help the Poor

**First Baptist Church Powell 1 10 16 PM**  
**Sermon 13: Here We Stand On Helping the Poor**  
**Series: Here We Stand**  
**1 John 3:17-18**

In our day, one of the most difficult commands in Scripture to obey is the command to help the poor. Personally, my problem is not a lack of compassion for the poor; it is knowing how to truly help the poor without actually hurting them. That is not an excuse; it is just a fact that we have to deal with in our culture.

It not as simple today as just setting aside our excess over basic needs and giving it to the poor. To simply give food, shelter, and clothing to those who say they have a need for it, is not always meeting *true* needs. When we indiscriminately give to anyone who has an apparent, or felt need, we actually have the potential of harming some by affirming and enabling an unbiblical lifestyle. It may be that they are in poverty because of laziness, an entitlement mentality, unwise use of funds that would have been sufficient to meet their basic needs, had they been spent based on good stewardship principles. Oftentimes in our culture basic needs aren't being met many because available funds were spent on drugs and/or alcohol. When we step in and give to meet those basic needs, we are simply making more funds available to them for sinful purchases.

Then let's look at the problem internationally. Those of us who have had the privilege of traveling to third world (the new phrase is "majority world") countries have seen the dire poverty and how heart breaking it is. I have been in the world's largest slum in Nairobi, Kenya and I have seen horrible slums in Brazil, in Guatemala, Nigeria, and numerous other places around the world that has broken my heart. But what do we do? In many countries, the street children work for organized crime and give the money they get, by begging, to the criminals who sent them out! Our hearts are filled with pity and a desire to do something. What do we do?

Do you see what I mean when I say that it is a complicated matter? In addition, we must always combine alleviating poverty with the making of disciples. If all we do is meet the basic need for food, clothing, and shelter, they will simply die and go to hell with a full belly and a body that has been sheltered from the elements.

I want to make sure that we understand that poverty is indeed a genuine problem in other nations and within a few miles of this church as well. We do not have the option of throwing up our hands in frustration and just ignoring the problem. The statistics are staggering. Approximately 1.4 billion people live on \$1.25 or less a day. Every day about 22,000 children die from diseases that are tied to poverty (don't let that statistic go in one ear and out the other). They die quietly and without publicity. Is all the poverty overseas? No, it is not. In Knox County, the latest figures I can find indicate that 12.6% of Knox County residents live below the poverty line (20.8% in the Knoxville city limits). In the broader region of East Tennessee, it is estimated that 167,000 live in poverty. It is estimated that 15.33% of the residents of Knox County are "food insecure" (not sure they will have enough to eat in the future). These statistics are very important because most of us are not around poverty on an average day. Let's look at an overview of the Scriptures and what they say about poverty and what our responsibility is.

## **I. The Bible Speaks to Poverty**

### **A. The Old Testament**

The Israelites had an ingenious welfare system that involved the recipients working. Leviticus 19:9-10 (NASB):

Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. Nor shall you glean your

vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the Lord your God.

We see an example of that working, in the book of Ruth, as Ruth went to the field of Boaz to gather grain for herself and her mother-in-law. A good general verse on what God desires for His people in relation to the poor is Deuteronomy 15:11 (NASB): “For the poor will never cease *to be* in the land; therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.’”

God is never pleased when His people harden their hearts to the poor. When we get to the book of Proverbs, we find a huge number of verses that speak about the poor. We are told to have mercy on the poor in Proverbs 14:21 (NASB): “He who despises his neighbor sins, but happy is he who is gracious to the poor.” When we come to the end of Proverbs, we see a description of the ideal woman. One of the things that characterize her is her attitude and actions toward the poor. Proverbs 31:20 (NASB): “She extends her hand to the poor, and she stretches out her hands to the needy.”

A common theme in the prophets is how God judges those who are unjust to the poor. No prophet speaks more boldly against injustice against the poor than Amos. Look at Amos 5:11-12 (NASB):

Therefore because you impose heavy rent on the poor and exact a tribute of grain from them, *though* you have built houses of well-hewn stone, yet you will not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, yet you will not drink their wine. <sup>12</sup> For I know your transgressions are many and your sins are great, *you* who distress the righteous *and* accept bribes and turn aside the poor in the gate.

## **B. The New Testament**

When a man invited Jesus to a feast He answered the man in Luke 14:13-14 (NASB): “But when you give a reception, invite *the* poor, *the* crippled, *the* lame, *the* blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have *the means* to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

Galatians 2:10 (NASB): “*They* only *asked* us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.”

James tells us that helping the poor is evidence that we do not have a dead faith.

James 2:15-17 (NASB): “If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself.”

That is only a sampling of the multitude of passages in the Bible related to commands and principles for responding to the poor.

## **II. A Brief History of the Church and Poverty**

We see from history that Christians were known for taking care of the poor. Let’s just look at the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. We see that it was almost exclusively the Christians that ministered to the poor. They took care of their own first, but they didn’t stop there. An example would be George Mueller, born in 1805, and after a wild young adult life he was saved and called to the ministry in Bristol, England. Mueller saw so many orphans roaming the streets that his heart was broken. He started several orphanages and operated them by faith, trusting God to provide through Christians. He never asked anyone for help but God and over the course of his ministry he saw the equivalent of over seven million dollars (that is 1800’s dollars) come in through the gifts of churches and individual believers. When Mueller died in 1898, over 10,000 orphans had been housed and cared for in the five orphanages he built.

Let’s move on to America. Prior to the early 1900’s the US government didn’t get involved in payments to individuals to ease poverty. President Grover Cleveland (President 1885-1889; 1893-1897) stated the prevailing policy of the US government on giving to “charity.” In response to a move for the government to help a worthy charity, President Cleveland said:

I will not be a party of stealing money from one group of citizens to give to another group of citizens; no matter what the need or the apparent justification. Once the coffers of the federal government are open to the public, there will be no shutting them again... It is the responsibility of the citizens to support their government. It is not the responsibility of the government to support its citizens.

[Quoted in Larry Burkett, *The Coming Economic Earthquake*, page 33]

That was the prevailing view prior to the New Deal of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Who cared for the poor if it wasn't the government? The overwhelming majority of care was from the church and Christian organizations. Think about it: Who started the hospitals? Look at their names: "Fort Sanders Presbyterian Hospital and Oak Ridge Methodist Hospital. Until recent years, it was Saint Mary's Catholic Hospital and Baptist Hospital. Look at other large institutions for helping those in need: The Salvation Army, the Red Cross, and on and on we could go. Even though many have lost much, if not most of their Christian emphasis, the name still stands on many to remind us that it started with Christians who were concerned with helping the poor and hurting.

What happened? Why did the government step in and virtually take over the care for the poor? I will tell you the short version. The church dropped the ball and the government picked it up. The government is way less qualified to help the poor, but the evangelical church failed to obey the Scriptural commands relating to the poor. When theological liberalism began to rise in the late 1800's and early 1900's, they de-emphasized salvation, and man's relationship with the God he was separated from, and began practicing what is called "the social gospel." The social gospel is really no gospel at all. It emphasized just meeting temporal need and for the most part taught "universalism" that says everyone will be saved in the end. The Evangelicals over-reacted to the liberals or "modernists" as they were called. The Evangelicals began to pull back from helping the poor and emphasized only salvation. This shift away from helping the poor was so dramatic that church historians refer to the period of 1900-1930 as the *Great Reversal* in the church's response to the poor.

Do you see the correlation between the churches' pulling back from the Biblical mandate to care for the poor and the government's picking up the ball and trying to run with it, as ineffective as it was and is? I will readily admit that what I have given you is a simplification and generalization of a complicated process, but I think it is an accurate generalization. Instead of being Biblically balanced in helping the poor in their temporal need while sharing the gospel that deals with eternal life, the evangelical church over-reacted to an error and found itself in error also.

### **III. The Root Problem that Must Be Addressed**

Most every physician has two great fears: First the physician is afraid of only treating symptoms and not dealing with the problem that underlies those symptoms. Second, the physician is afraid of misdiagnosing the underlying problem and giving treatment that doesn't affect the real problem. Often the church has done both of those things in trying to help the poor. We have treated symptoms (hunger, homelessness or inadequate housing, addictions, etc.) and left the root cause untouched. We have also misdiagnosed the root cause and have been trying to help the poor in ways that not only does not help the root problem, but many times makes the real problem worse.

Many churches, and individual Christians, set out with great zeal to help the poor but they have the same problem the Jews had that Paul spoke of in Romans 10:2 (NASB): "For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge." Let me just cut right to the core of this problem. Other than the poor, who are temporarily poor because of a catastrophe in their life (natural disaster, home burned, job loss, etc.), the underlying problem with most of the long term poor in America is an unbiblical worldview. Your worldview is the lens through which you see everything. Your worldview is your perspective on yourself, your perspective of God and your relationship with Him, and your perspective on your circumstances. In other words, your worldview colors how you see God, yourself, others, and your

circumstances. Everybody has a worldview whether they know it or not. The root of most long term poverty (especially in the USA) is a worldview that is not in line with the Scriptures. Any true help for the poor has to deal with this root problem. In other words, there must be a “holistic” approach instead of just giving material things. There will certainly be times that giving money, clothing, and food (especially to children) is appropriate in this holistic approach, but if all we do is give money and material things, we have likely done more harm than good. By just continually giving money, clothes, and food, we have often *affirmed* an unbiblical worldview instead of helping them have a God-centered, Biblical worldview. While the giver may *feel good* about their gift, they have not truly helped the poor. Let’s look at some key elements of a Biblical worldview.

### **A. A Biblical View of God**

God is sovereign! That means that God is in control. Our goal in life is to give glory to this sovereign God. This sovereign God is the source of every supply we truly need. The government is not our source; other people are not our source; God is our source. God is the center of all that is, and pleasing and glorifying Him is the reason we exist.

### **B. A Biblical View of Self**

Every person needs to see himself as being created in the image of God, but having that image twisted by sin that came into the world through Adam. The greatest need of every person is to be rightly related to the God who created us for His glory. Through the new birth we are reconciled to God and made a new person. As a sinner who has become a saint (a set apart one), I now have the capacity to glorify God, and I am neither inferior to nor superior to any other person. I am a unique, Holy Spirit indwelt, loved, accepted, forgiven, justified, blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, and a child of God. The old me in Adam is crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20; Romans 6:6) and I am no longer a slave to sin.

Most people that perpetually live in poverty have a very unbiblical view of themselves. They may not be a Christian, but even if they are, they often feel inferior to the non-poor, inadequate to make it on their own in the world, beat down, failures that have little, if any, hope of ever being anything other than they are. On the outside, they often look like they’re lazy (some are), but in reality many are beat down and hopeless. If we are really going to help the poor, we must get to this root of an unbiblical view of self.

### **C. A Biblical View of Circumstances**

The long-term poor often see themselves as victims. That is not a Biblical worldview. I am not being flippant here. When you hear the stories of many who are caught up in this cycle of poverty, your heart breaks, and you truly wonder if you had been through what they’ve been through if you would even do as well as they do! To really deal with the underlying cause of poverty, they must see their past as Joseph saw his in Genesis 50:20 (NASB): “As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.” The New Testament equivalent of that verse is Romans 8:28-29 (NASB):

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren.

What do we call this process of coming alongside a person to instruct them in and model for them a Biblical worldview? It is discipleship. There is no real help for those in poverty (or even those rich in this world’s goods for that matter) but that they become a truly surrendered, growing disciple of Jesus Christ. Giving money to them won’t bring about their becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ.

#### **IV. Stages of Helping the Poor**

Several years ago our elders and several of our ministry directors read a book written by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert entitled *When Helping Hurts*. The sub-title is *How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor and Yourself*. In that book (which has a very Biblical base) they give three categories of help that truly help the poor.

The first category is *Relief*. Relief is the urgent and temporary provision of emergency aid to reduce immediate suffering from a natural or a man-made crisis. An example would be the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, a house burning down, a woman who has escaped an abusive home, an unexpected job loss, etc. The second category of help is *Rehabilitation*. This category is longer term efforts to help restore a person to their *pre-crisis* circumstances. This becomes a great opportunity for discipleship since a time of crisis often serves to open people up to needed Biblical change.

The third category of help is *Development*. Development is the long term process of discipling the long term materially poor so that they are dependent on God alone and with God's help can meet their need for the basic necessities of life. This development requires a huge time investment and a willingness to make the tough decisions that involve saying "no" to relief type help when the need is development. It involves not only teaching a Biblical worldview, but coming alongside the materially poor to equip them to live out that Biblical worldview. This world view training is a part of discipling the materially poor person. Our task is not just to teach them a biblical worldview of work, but also to tutor them in getting a GED, build a network of people that help the materially poor find a job, to teach budgeting and saving, etc. This leads a person out of material poverty to see God as their source and live independently of the gifts of others. To treat a long-term materially poor person like they are in a relief category is not only not helping them; it is hurting them and keeping them from doing the hard work required to reach a state where they are materially dependent on no one but God.

This brings me to the last point.

#### **V. The Plan to Help the Poor**

In a word, the plan is *discipleship*. We are probably doing more than many of you may be aware of. Our plan locally is to go to where the long term poor are and disciple them, including teaching them a biblical worldview. We have churches and ministries in mobile home parks, government subsidized housing, and a campus in a local government subsidized housing area. We do help financially with those in the relief and rehabilitation stages. There are lots of people in our congregation involved. We do not just give out money! We want to truly help and do nothing to help perpetuate an unbiblical worldview and affirm an unbiblical lifestyle. We do help children with immediate needs even though their parent(s) may not be living according to a biblical worldview. Our desire is to do more. Some rearranging of our deacon's focus will help in this with practical training in budgeting, GED preparation, and job placement help. When it comes to poverty in other countries, we simply seek to invest our time and resources in two areas of ministry – planting new churches and strengthening existing churches. A part of the DNA we seek to instill is teaching the poor a biblical worldview and giving practical help in equipping the poor who come to Christ to be able to get work. Let me give you an example. We have been working with Pastor Gideon Makuthe for over a decade. The town in Kenya where Gideon was led to start a church was on a major road with many truckers and the town was known for its prostitution. As the prostitutes started getting saved, there was a problem with how to support themselves and their children. The Salama Baptist Church took responsibility for doing something about it. There was a Holy Spirit initiated plan to buy gas ovens so that the women could bake bread and sell bread to the truckers instead of selling their bodies. Where would the money come from to buy the industrial ovens? A group of our women, and others, raised the money, the ovens were bought in Kenya, and as far as I know the women are still selling bread to support themselves and their families. That is just one illustration of how helping the poor must work. It is a lot easier to just give money, but that isn't truly helping!

## **Conclusion**

If in any way you look down on or feel superior to the poor, you need to repent. We are all messed up people who desperately need Jesus. Just like you, those in the depths of poverty are in the image of God – an image that has been twisted by sin and can only be restored by Jesus Christ. They are the objects of God’s love and Christ’s heart of compassion, and the last thing those in poverty need (whether it is in the inner city of Knoxville or in the slums of South America, Africa, or India) is a condescending attitude of pity on a lesser being. Many of the poor have been through such traumatic things in their lives that if you or I had been through them we likely wouldn’t be doing as well as they are. One of the ways we injure the poor is to give them things but not be willing to sit down with them to listen and share our time and life, and to share the love and the life of Christ with them. Yes, many of them have been subtly taught that the government is god when it comes to meeting needs. God desires for them to turn from their idolatry and to turn to Him whose name is Jehovah Jireh (the Lord who provides). We want to be a part of that.