

Being Friends of the Poor

Joe Slater

Solomon spoke three thousand proverbs (1 Kings 4:32). We find many of them in the Old Testament book bearing that name. In general, a proverb makes a point with a short, memorable saying. Sometimes it warns against sin or foolishness; other times it may describe a sad but true real-life situation.

For example, Proverbs 14:20 says, *“The poor man is hated even by his own neighbor; but the rich has many friends.”* Of course not all poor people are hated by their neighbors; this proverb, like many others, is a general statement which admits of exceptions. But Solomon had observed, as most of us have, that people often despise the poor while cozying up to the rich. It is a purely selfish behavior – sad, but true. Those poor people over there can’t do anything for me; in fact, they need my help (which my selfish soul resents), so I despise them. But this rich fellow over here can help me get what I want, so I’ll treat him like my best friend.

Sickening? Yes, but it happens. Winners of the lottery, Publisher’s Clearing House Sweepstakes, etc., routinely find themselves bombarded with calls and letters from “friends” and maybe even long-lost relatives they never knew they had!

I’m glad the next proverb comments on this first one: *“He who despises his neighbor sins; but he who has mercy on the poor, happy is he”* (14:21). Yes, it’s true that people often despise the poor; but such ought not to be, and those who act that way sin against God! From Genesis to Revelation, God has always expected His people to demonstrate compassion to those less fortunate than themselves. Mosaic Law was jam-packed with commands to help the widows, orphans, foreigners, and others who were disadvantaged or poverty-stricken. In

the Christian age, the church assisted the poor from the very beginning in Jerusalem (Acts 4:34-37 et. al.).

Jesus would certainly agree that the one who has mercy on the poor is blessed (happy). He challenged the rich to invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind to their feasts, rather than limiting the guest list to their wealthy friends (Luke 14:13).

Because Jesus taught that *“it is more blessed to give than to receive,”* the apostle Paul labored not only to provide for his own needs, but to help others; and he challenged the elders at Ephesus to do the same (Acts 20:34, 35). Let us accept that challenge as well. Help people who cannot repay you. That’s what Jesus did; as members of His spiritual body, let us go and do likewise!

#

Praise Team

The University Church of Christ in Montgomery, when the Faulkner University students are in town, has a 600+ member praise team. Many resident members, many of our youth, and of course, many of our college students read music. The four-part harmony is beautiful. All the parts can be distinguished. The singing is vigorous, uplifting, and glorious to participate in.

No one is excluded from our praise team. No one is made to think, “You don’t sing well enough.” Every “joyful noise . . . to the Lord” is welcome.

Our congregation is our praise team.

-- Cecil May, Jr. (Montgomery, AL) via *Preacher Talk*

What Really Matters

"It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes" (Psalm 118:8, 9).

If you're serious about arriving at the end of your life spent, satisfied and fulfilled, then examining what Jesus brings to life, to make it abundant, is worth some serious effort.

What is it that is at the center of our obsession to make the most out of our "one life"? Although I don't claim to have all the answers, I do lay before you some suggestions that I believe are plausible answers to the question.

I believe one of those values is a concern for significance. I was pleased to read in a recent poll that 89% of millennials had given a monetary gift to some cause. That would be a strong indication that they want to be a part of something bigger than themselves. They want to be part of something that is noteworthy.

Since Jesus Christ is who He claims to be, then His agenda, in which he invites us to take part, becomes our agenda. It is the most noble and noteworthy cause the world has or will ever know.

What can be greater than connecting those who are estranged from God with his grace and mercy?

What could be greater than proclaiming the arrival of the new and desperately needed kingdom through the word that we have been given?

What could possibly matter more than binding up the hurts of a broken heart with genuine love and a message of peace that comes through Jesus Christ?

Nothing!

--Dennis Russell (Santa Maria, CA)