

Our Responsibility to the Poor



God's Abundance (Part 17)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again.

We are continuing today with our theme of God's abundance. I've been emphasizing that God makes His abundance available to us for every good work—not for our own selfish ends, but for every good work. This is stated in 2 Corinthians 9:8:

> "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound to every good work." (NIV)

We need to focus on the latter part of the verse—not miss that out. God is able to make His grace abound toward us so we can always have all our needs supplied. Thank God for that. But remember that I said earlier abundance is having all that you need and something over to give to others. And so when we're talking about abundance, we must always come to the end purpose of abundance which is having something over to give to others. Not indulging ourselves and squandering things on ourselves, but having something over.

You see, Jesus said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." As long as you're only on the receiving end, you only have the lesser blessing. God so loves all His children that He wants all of us to have the greater blessing. So He wants us to be in a position where we cannot merely receive but we can have to give. And that's one main reason why He promises His abundance to us—that we can enter into the greater blessing—not just of receiving but of giving. It is more blessed to give than to receive. That's really true. It's not just a nice pious sentiment. If you put it into practice, you'll find that it's blessed to receive, but it really is a much greater blessing to give. And so that is why God makes abundance available to us because He doesn't want any of us to be deprived of the blessing of giving.

Now there are various specific ways in which the Bible directs us to give. The Bible does not leave us to speculate or decide for ourselves how we are to give, but it provides us with certain objectives, certain directions in which we should channel our giving. And I'm going to deal with several of these in my talks this week. Today I'm going to deal with one

main way of giving and that is helping the poor.

Now I have to say that there are many different kinds of Christians in the world today with different backgrounds. Some Christians come from backgrounds where they've been really trained to have an attitude of care and compassion for the poor. I am not a Catholic myself by background but I would like to say that in many areas of the Catholic church there is a real strong Godly emphasis on caring for the poor and the needy. On the other hand, in some sections of what's known as the Evangelical Church, there's such an emphasis on being saved by faith that sometimes good works have almost dropped out. And I think many, many evangelicals are in danger of ignoring the clear teaching of Scripture that we have an obligation to the poor. So I'm going to cite a number of passages of Scripture that bring out very clearly the obligation that all of us have to be charitable and compassionate and to offer practical help to the poor. A number of these passages are taken from the book of Proverbs—put together they are very, very powerful in their impact. Proverbs 21:13:

> "If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered." (NIV)

God says when you hear a poor person cry to you for help, if you shut your ears, the time will come in your life when you'll be crying out for help, but you won't be answered because you didn't answer the cry of the poor. That's a real warning for all of us. We might say to ourselves, "Well, I'm not in need, I'm not crying out." But there is none of us—without the mercy and grace of God—that can ever be absolutely sure we never will be in need. God says there may come a time when you'll be in need, you'll be crying out for help. In the meanwhile if you've answered the cry of the poor for help, then you have an assurance when your turn comes to cry your cry will heard and answered. Proverbs 29.7:

> "The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern." (NIV)

See, there's a very clear dividing line between the righteous and the wicked. One scriptural mark of righteousness is to care about justice for the poor, but one evidence of wickedness is to have no concern for the poor. That's a very penetrating Scripture. If we are careless, casual, selfish in our attitude to the poor, the Bible describes that as wickedness.

On the positive side the Bible absolutely requires us to show mercy to the poor. Proverbs 19 verse 17:

> "He who is gracious to a poor man lends to the Lord, and He [the Lord] will repay him for his good deed." (NASB)

So when, with the right motives, we are gracious to the poor—when we give to the poor—we're giving to the poor but we're lending to the Lord. And I tell you it's good policy to lend to the Lord. I want to speak out of personal experience extending over more than 40 years. When you give to the poor and lend to the Lord, there will come a time in your life when the Lord will pay you back what you've lent. And I want to add the Lord gives a good rate of interest on loans to Him. So in a certain sense it's just enlightened self-interest to be good to the poor. And again in Proverbs 28:27:

> "He who gives to the poor will never want, but he who shuts his eyes will have many curses." (NASB)

There is really a guarantee from God in His Word. If you give to the poor, you'll never want. But if you shut your eyes to the need of the poor, there will be many curses that will come upon you.

You see, today it is very easy for some of us to shut our eyes to the needs of the poor. They are not right in our pathway. They are not right before our eyes. They are in another land, in another nation. They are in the Third World or they're in the inner city or they're somewhere else. But if we are not aware of the fact that there are poor who need help, we really today are guilty of shutting our eyes because the knowledge is available to us.

I also want to quote Daniel's advice to Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel was one of the court counselors to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar had a dream which he was very disturbed about which predicted some kind of judgment that was to come upon him. And he went to Daniel for the interpretation of the dream and Daniel was very disturbed because he said this is a clear prediction of judgment upon you, O King. But then Daniel offered King Nebuchadnezzar this advice, in Daniel chapter 4 verse 27:

> "Therefore, O King, may my advice be pleasing to you: break away now from your sins by doing righteousness, and from your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity." (NASB)

You see, there is no such thing as neutrality between sin and righteousness. If you are going to renounce sin, you've got to be committed to positive righteousness. So Daniel says,

"Break away from your sins by doing righteousness, give up your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor." There has got to be an alternative. So the alternative to Nebuchadnezzar's iniquities was to show mercy to the poor. Daniel said if you'll do that it may prolong your prosperity.

And then I want to quote from the New Testament. Some of the apostles had a consultation as to who should go the Gentiles and who should go to the Jews. And they came together and they resolved their differences this way—in Galatians 2:9 and 10.

> "James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do." (NIV)

You see, no matter where you are sent with the ministry of the Gospel there is one thing that the New Testament requires of you—whether you are sent to the Jews or to the Gentiles—that we should remember the poor. And Paul said, "I didn't have to be told that. I agreed to it that I was already committed to being kind to the poor." So part of the Gospel ministry is remembering the poor. When we speak about being good to the poor and needy, there is one category of persons that the Scripture lays special emphasis upon. And that is widows and orphans. James chapter 1 verse 27:

> "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." (NIV)

A lot of people today emphasize keep yourself from being polluted by the world, don't become worldly, don't indulge in worldly pleasures and entertainments, and all those things. Which is all good enough, but pure religion is not primarily negative, it's positive. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father starts with this: looking after orphans and widows in their distress. It's no good emphasizing the negative if you don't apply the positive. If you claim to have pure religion, acceptable to God, it will be demonstrated by looking after orphans and widows. And again, let me say to you there is no shortage of orphans and widows in the world today. There are millions that we can afford to help.

I want to add my personal testimony. Because of my life God has led me to accept responsibility for 12 adopted children.

Not only that but I'm well aware that there are orphans in many other countries, especially in Asia and in Africa that need care from Christians. And I say it but I say it without boasting. For many years I have always accepted responsibility for the support of orphans. Two in Asia, one in India. I don't think that's anything to be particularly proud of. I think it is something that the New Testament requires.

> "Religion that God our Father accepts is pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

Don't just major on the negative. Remember the positive comes first. And remember there is no shortage of opportunity. And remember that God is willing to make His abundance available to you for every good work.

Our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. I'll be sharing with you further good works for which God makes His abundance to us.

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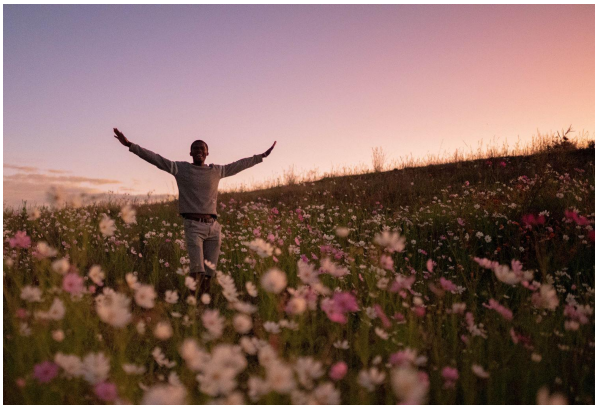

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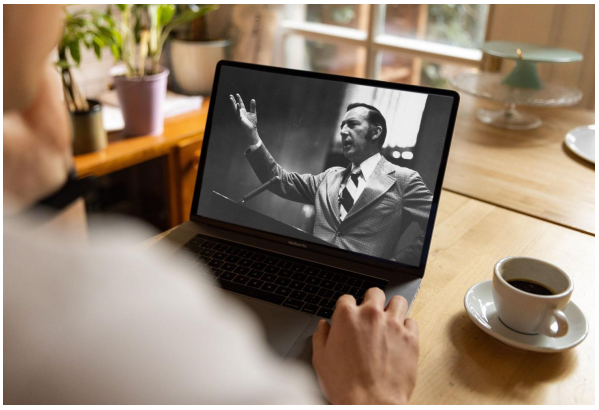

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