

Why are the poor so very important? (14:31)

He who oppresses the poor taunts his Maker, but he who is gracious to the needy honors Him.

THE TEXT (NASB)

He who oppresses the poor taunts his Maker, but he who is gracious to the needy honors Him.

He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor. Classic KJV - Proverbs 14:31

INTRODUCTION



Our attitude to the poor reflects our attitude to God.

This proverb is written for the benefit of the rich, to teach them how to treat the poor. To mistreat the needy is to pick a fight with God. To treat the poor kindly is to befriend God.

How does the proper attitude toward the poor affect employment and insurance?



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COMMENTARY

This text is similar to Proverbs 17:5 (NASB): “He who mocks the poor taunts His Maker. He who rejoices at calamity will not go unpunished.” God Himself makes some people poor and others wealthy. Some are born rich, and some born destitute. Some are given real opportunities to change their financial status; others are not. God’s Providence determines the cards we get. It’s up to us to play those cards.

Translation: *Poor, Taunts, Maker, Oppress*



Hebrew word for “poor” here, דל (dāl, pronounced “dahl”), is used forty-six times in the Old Testament. Its root meaning denotes “low” or “handing down.” The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT)* says that the word dāl denotes a lack of material worth or social resources. It usually refers to the lower classes in society, lacking any material security.

The Hebrew word for “taunt” here, חָרַץ (ḥā•rāp, pronounced “khah-raf”), is also translated as “insults” by the *Revised Standard Version*, and “reproaches” in other English translations. It includes the notions of “affront” and “defy.” The word is used five times in 1 Samuel 17 to describe Goliath’s attitude toward Israel and its God. Goliath taunted both. Goliath’s defiant attitude cowed the terrified Israelites, until David challenged and butchered him. David first attacked Goliath with only his sling and a stream-polished stone, so he reasonably credited neither the stone nor his own skilful aim for Goliath’s overthrow, but only the power of the living God.

The term “Maker” appears first in the Book of Job, the oldest book in the Bible, as Job asks, “Can a man be pure before his Maker?” Job 4:17b. God is the Maker of both the rich and the poor. Our Creator sees to the depths of our being, and we cannot hide anything from Him. God took Job from being the richest, happiest man in his land, to the poorest, most miserable “worm,” and then restored him to even greater wealth and respect. Through all this, Job trusted God, regardless of his condition.

The Hebrew word for “oppresses” here, עָשָׂק (ā•šāq, pronounced “ah-shak”) can also be properly translated as: “defrauds,” “wrongs,” or “deceives.” It’s first used in Leviticus 6:2, to



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indicate a financial offense against an associate. So, though it's wrong to rob or cheat anyone, this proverb states that financial abuse of the poor is a far more dangerous crime. It is a crime against God himself.

Poverty Hurts



It's a foolish error to paint all the poor with the same critical brush. Some are poor through laziness or waste of their assets, but many are poor through no fault of their own. To abuse the poor is to kick them when they're down. So why would anyone oppress the poor, the most vulnerable? When they have nothing to be grabbed, their oppressor must either be exploiting their labour (with slavery or starvation wages), or he may simply be malicious, delighting in their misery. Either way, the oppressor is playing God with another human being, using the helpless as a tool. So an employer who fails to provide his workers with a living wage is in danger of God's wrath. God Himself takes the side of the underdog.

No surprise, among the sinners who risk "vengeance from heaven" (in addition to the sorcerers, perjurers and adulterers) are those "who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan, those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts," Malachi 3:5. So these sins against the helpless are treated as deliberately disrespecting God Himself.

An Alternative to Insurance

According to this text, anybody who mistreats the poor provokes God Himself. Similarly, God promises to honour those who honour Him (1 Samuel 2:30). So by treating the poor well, we can ensure our own respect for God and his beneficial response toward us. God identifies with the helpless, and sooner or later he avenges them. Since God is sovereign, befriending of the poor can be seen as an alternative to insurance premiums. Beware of paying too much into trust funds and insurance policies, lest you leave nothing for the poor. This proverb points to a different estate strategy: By helping the poor, you make God your helper and, with His Protection, have less need for insurance.



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OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus seemed to favour the poor over the wealthy (Luke 6:24). Why? Wealth seems to encourage pride and self-sufficiency, not always, but often. There is no sin that God hates more than arrogance. In fact, God opposes the proud but gives grace (kindness and life) to the humble (James 4:6).

Further, though Jesus was the wealthiest, the Sovereign of the Universe, He became the poorest, so we could become the richest (2 Corinthians 8:9). For though the LORD is exalted, yet He regards the lowly, but the haughty, He knows from afar (Psalm 138:6).

To know God better make sure you treat the poor with compassion. Rich people may be important, but the poor are more important.

APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Don't make the mistake of thinking that all who are poor are poor by their own choice.
- Be kind to the poor. Beware! Don't snub or belittle them.
- View your kindness to the poor as a form of worshiping God; that's how He sees it. Study Psalm 9:17-18 to learn the connection between God and the poor.

Which of these steps, if any, does Jesus want you to take now? Ask Him.



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KEY WORDS

better life (quality), generosity, gracious, honor, insurance, kindness, Maker, oppression, human resources, poor (dāl pronounced “dahl”), sovereignty, taunt, income, bf sharing

ILLUSTRATION

Who is Generous Genevieve?



Generous Genevieve loves to give and has a big heart. Sometimes she chuckles to herself as she gives her gifts. Now here's a secret about her giving: She only gives to those who really need it—not just to anyone who asks for a handout. She gives because she thinks it's the right thing to do.

Strangely enough, the more she gave to those in genuine need, the more she got back. Some people give in order to get, but she considers that mere trading. Generous Genevieve gives for the sheer thrill of it. By giving she is keeping herself from emotional cancer. Emotional cancer, also known as greed, can take over one's heart and destroy their ability to enjoy even the simple things of life. Genevieve gives in order to increase her giving capacity.

Sometimes it hurts Genevieve to give. Sometimes she is short of cash because she has given to someone else, but that shortage doesn't last long.

Genevieve believes that there is always a reward for giving to those in need. She thinks that her generosity will come back to her benefit sooner or later. She coined the expression, "What goes



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around—comes around.”

