

Why Does the Lord's Church NOT Fight Poverty?

7-21-13

What Is Poverty? Is it: "the state of not having enough money to take care of basic needs such as food, clothing, and housing" or is it: "the condition of having less than another"? The first of these definitions is correct, and the second of these definitions is commonly accepted.

What Causes Poverty? A survey of various studies finds the following contributing causes:

- Education, skill, intelligence
- Physical condition
- Culture of poverty
- Politics
- Discrimination

More importantly, what is the underlying issue of all of these causes? SIN. Sin is the ultimate cause of genuine poverty.

The History of Churches and Poverty:

Before World War II, very few churches/denominations were minded to a war against poverty. There existed Catholic hospitals and charities and Protestant hospitals and charities, but they were independent of churches. One unique exception was the Salvation Army, a denomination founded in 1865 to fight poverty.

After World War II, there was a change in how churches viewed poverty. With soldiers coming back to America, there was a drive to rebuild Europe, and to evangelize these places. Later, poverty became a political issue, so that today, many believe that churches ought to be about social issues rather than spiritual. Jim Wallis in Call to Renewal stated "Poverty is becoming the leading issue for churches.". Many believe the church ought to engage in poverty reduction through charity; today churches establish soup kitchens, shelters, or financial disbursements.

Should the Lord's church follow? This lesson points out three "strikes" that indicate the Lord's church SHOULD NOT war against poverty: the Strike of Examples; the Strike of Possibilities; the Strike of Consequences.

Examples of the Church: Every single example of the church of the first century assisting the poor is exclusively for the Saints. Acts 11:28-29; Galatians 2; I Corinthians 16; II Corinthians 8-9; Romans 15:25. Not one time is there even a hint that the church used its means to aid the poor of the world. Not only is the example exclusive, it is also very limited. In I Timothy 5 specific qualifications are made for widows whom the Lord's church should assist. In II Thessalonians 3 Paul made it clear that church assistance was to be denied to those who would not work.

Is it Possible? Is the church equipped to fight poverty? The only income the church receives is an offering made by its members on the first day of the week (I Corinthians 16:1-2). That offering is not a set amount, but only what a member desires to give (II Corinthians 9:7). Such a low key means of financial support COULD NOT POSSIBLY be meant to engage in large scale social works such as poverty reduction. In other words, if I gave you a dollar to buy some bread, it is clear I do not intend for you to buy a car with that money.

Are there consequences? Jesus fed the poor: what happened?

John 6:26 Jesus answered them and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled."

John 6:66 From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.

When we make people dependant: "The dependency syndrome contributes much to poverty of communities and nations. The charity mode of developmental aid, in turn, contributes much to the dependency syndrome." DEPENDENCY AND POVERTY by Phil Bartle, PhD

Here is perhaps the most significant question: does a war on poverty directly actually solve anything? In 1964 the US government made it a purpose of government to reduce poverty. At that time the poverty rate was around 15%. Since then the US has spent \$5 Trillion fighting poverty. Has it worked? The poverty rate holds steady at 15%. Why does it not work? Because they are fighting the symptoms, not the causes. Consider this: since 1954 the USA has shipped millions of tons of food aid to India - to the Indian government (not private businesses or agencies). Rats have consumed more than half of this food at the docks and storage facilities. Because of Hinduism's belief in reincarnation, rats and sacred cows may not be killed.

What is the cause of poverty? SIN. The REAL Cure of Poverty is the Gospel! It changes the factors of contribution. It offers the support of the church. If anyone wanted to truly and successfully fight poverty, they must fight SIN. Can the church fight sin? We are EQUIPPED to do this! We are AUTHORIZED to do this! Finally, the CONSEQUENCES work!

WE DO NOT involve ourselves in charities. We have No Authority to do so, we are NOT Equipped to do so, and there are far too many Negative Consequences to consider trying.