

## 49 Enough but not too much

Hardly a day goes by without some fresh statistics being published, showing the widening gulf between the rich and the poor in society.

A fortunate few seem to be doing very nicely indeed, thank you very much. Bankers come to mind, and "celebrity" lawyers, and perhaps hedge fund managers, and of course a few top footballers - occupations in which, for all sorts of reasons, the financial rewards have become way out of line with what the rest of us would consider fair and reasonable.

Apart from the few at the top, not many of us would regard such a situation as being healthy or beneficial for the long-term good of society.

This rich-poor gulf in a society is an ancient tendency. In Old Testament times, the Lord instructed His people to observe "the Jubilee" (see Leviticus Chapters 25 and 27). This was a simple system of "resetting the clock" every 49 years.

Those who had fallen on hard times, such as being sold into slavery or having had to sell family land to make ends meet, were restored to how things had been for them at the start of the Jubilee cycle. The slate was wiped clean, they were given a fresh start, freedom, dignity and a second chance.

Those who had become very rich, by fair means or perhaps by foul, had their "wealth-wings" clipped at the Jubilee. They were obliged to release anyone who had become trapped into slavery, and to hand back any ancestral lands, for free, which they had bought during the Jubilee. They would still be wealthy, but the system forced the wealthy to be mindful of the needs of those around them, and particularly of those for whom life was much tougher. They were not just free to "make a pile and go hang everybody else"

So the Jubilee provided a simple but effective safety-valve to halt the tendency of the rich-poor gulf to grow ever wider.

There is that lovely little passage in Proverbs 30.8b-9 - "(O Lord) ... give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, "Who is the Lord?" Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonour the name of my God".

As always, God's Word has it "spot on". Having too much wealth puts us in great danger of our forgetting the Lord and our dependence upon Him. "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven", the Lord Himself tells us (Luke 18.24). Yet having too little can lead to constant stress, envy, bitterness and even crime.

And we do well to remember the extraordinary workings of the Heavenly Bank (Luke 6.38-39): the more we give away, the more is given to us, in abundance. This is madness in the world's eyes, but since when did the world's eyes matter more than the Lord's eyes?

Whatever our wealth and income, our responsibilities as Christ's faithful sheep are clear: to use our God-given gifts as well as we can manage in earning a fair reward for our labours, so as to avoid being a financial drain on others; to be careful stewards of the money entrusted to us; to live within our means; to provide for those for whom we have responsibility; to give as we are able to the Lord's work and to our neighbours in need; and come what may, to be thankful and cheerful in our Christian discipleship.

Enough but not too much, and a generous heart towards those in need. How are things looking in your neck of the financial woods??

"And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Colossians 3.17).

Amen to that.

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