

## **Is poverty spiritual?**

This month's Money Matters begins a two-part series on extreme views about finances. This month we will focus on the view that Christians must be poor to be holy. Next month we will look at the view that Christians should have everything the world has to offer.

### **A right attitude**

All throughout Scripture, God teaches that words without corresponding actions mean absolutely nothing. In a generation in which many people live by fear, God expects His people to live by faith.

When Christ directed His disciples to take no provisions with them, they were to live by faith. Those to whom they were ministering would supply their needs. There is also no doubt that Christ has directed many others since that time to do the same thing.

However, characteristics that separate those who are called to this lifestyle from those who just impose those hardships on themselves are attitudes of peace, love and joy. In 1 Cor. 13:3 Paul writes "If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."

### **Ego and legalism**

The Pharisees of Christ's day did what they thought were great things for God, and most of the "things" they did were even the right things. They prayed often and long, they fasted, they tithed, and so forth. Christ never challenged their actions; He challenged their motives (Luke 11:42). They were so blinded by their own self-righteousness they couldn't see God's true promises. Christ confronted them with this truth in Matthew 12:7. Some of them were prideful in their poverty, while others required the best of everything. But in God's eyes they suffered from a common malady: ego.

### **Verifications of the call**

It's interesting how some Bible-believers may focus on a single Scripture to justify their actions, while ignoring other references contrary to their personal "revelation." This is not to discredit a believer's uniqueness in the world. God calls each of us to a radical lifestyle (total commitment to Him), but rarely does the Lord call us to voluntary poverty. And He never singles out an individual to such a lifestyle without other verifications of this calling.

Some of these verifications will be love, compassion, and acceptance that God doesn't call everyone to sacrifice similarly. This truth was evidenced in Scripture when Peter proclaimed to Christ that he was ready to go to prison and die for his "faith." Christ responded by telling him that he would deny his faith three times before morning (a real ego deflator).

Then He reminded His disciples of the time earlier when they had been instructed to go out without taking any provisions, only this time He gave them new instructions. "He

said to them, ‘When I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?’ They said, ‘No, nothing.’ And He said to them, ‘But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever who has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one’ ” (Luke 22:35-36).

The possession or absence of material things is not an issue in serving Christ. What matters is our attitude about those things. It is important for us not to assume the role of God’s advisor in the area of sacrifice. God knows what each of us is called to do, and He equips us to do it.

To be or not to be...poor? The possession or absence of material things is not an issue in serving Christ. What matters is our attitude about those things.
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