

Christianity in the Rich Poor World

These reflections can be used as a starting point to a group discussion or Bible study.

Justice and the church

As we look at biblical truth concerning just relationships then our first steps should be to apply them within the church.

1 Peter 2:9-10

Only as the church is transformed socially and economically will any appeal to governments to change laws and regulations possess integrity. Christian social action has to be lived by its members.

Micah 6:8 — What does the Lord require...to act justly...

James 2:14-17 — What good is it...if a man claims to have faith, but has no deeds.

The Old Testament revealed God's anger with societies of surrounding nations, not just the people of God — eg Amos. So Christians should exercise their political influence to make social systems more fair — so that all of society benefits.

- How is our church involved in Christian social action?
- If a few members are involved how does the church get to know?
- Are there areas in which we should be involved?
- How could that be brought about?

Need or greed?

Proverbs 23:4 — perhaps we should be developing a theology of 'enough'...simpler lifestyles, policies that permit people to choose parenting, community service over maximising income. Should we consider whether we consume more than we need, and re-direct more of our wealth to the poor?

- How do we decide what is 'enough'?
- How do we raise these issues within the church?

The plenty of a few

In the New Testament Jesus focuses on the rich, where the overwhelming majority were poor. That suggests he believed in the direct link between the plenty of the few and the lack of many.

According to Ronald Sider, American evangelicals have roughly \$800 billion in after-tax income, spend \$8 billion on weight reduction and \$2 billion on mission (including

giving to the poor). If they shared 1% of their disposable income with the poor annually it would amount to \$48 billion.

It costs roughly \$1,000 to create one job in small-scale industry in a 'third world' context. \$8 billion = 8 million jobs and benefit to 40 million people.

- The parallels may not be exactly the same in the UK — but where do our priorities lie, and should we consider the impact of our lifestyle, as a church?
- Are there practical steps we can take?

The love of money?

Jesus illustrates the danger of wealth through a number of parables.

The rich fool (Luke 12: 16-21) focuses on the rich farmer who invested in earthly possessions.

The rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16: 19-31) where the poor man is part of the plot, and Jesus confirms that those who serve mammon get their joy in a brief period of earthly existence.

The sower (Luke 8:14) illustrates how those who seem to welcome the Gospel are drawn away through love of money and the things of this world.

The rich young ruler (Luke 18:18-30) Here it is clear that to Jesus, attitude to wealth is a matter of eternal salvation — not that sharing his possessions would save the young ruler, but rather that Jesus wants to be Lord over the whole of life.