

## Equality! . . . But How?

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Inequality is a social ill that drags humanity down. But how do we minimize its harmful influence? The answer may surprise you.

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*“You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor” (Lev. 19:15).*

*“For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality” (2 Cor. 8:13-14).*



The common theme in both passages is “equality.” Given the extensive attention given to equality in our modern political discourse, we should examine what these texts say on the topic.

The Leviticus passage guided judges in adjudicating cases. Neither rich nor poor were to be given any advantages by virtue of their status. Justice must not tilt in favor of the mighty because of his wealth; neither should the poor be shown special favors because of his poverty. Our modern concept of “equal justice before the law” comes from this ancient principle of impartiality. A healthy society depends on everyone knowing they stand as equals before the law.

Paul’s counsel to the Corinthians also advocates for equality, but of a different sort. Paul was soliciting charity for the poor saints in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-3; Rom. 15:25-27). The Corinthians had

agreed to participate in this benevolent activity but needed a little nudging from Paul to fulfill their commitment. The impoverished Jews were their brethren in the faith, and this was an opportunity for the wealthy Corinthians to use their assets to lift their brethren out of their dire circumstances. The equality Paul is promoting here is of a charitable nature, personal and voluntary.

Contrast both of these passages with modern attempts to artificially make citizens equal by *forcibly* transferring the wealth of the rich to the poor. These efforts never work, because they violate the spirit and letter of both Biblical principles, unleashing the passions of envy and revenge. When the rich are forced to give up their assets to help others, they see it as a “theft” of their goods, while the poor develop a sense of entitlement that feeds a never-ending demand for more “adjustments.”

History shows us the fruits of this warped view of equality. The French Revolution of 1789-1799 had as its motto “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.” Ironically, this effort to force equality on the population plunged France into an era of death and destruction. Thousands lost their heads to the guillotine in the name of equality.

A century later, the Russian Revolution sought to eliminate the bourgeoisie and lift up the workers and peasants. Following the philosophy of Karl Marx, who taught that equality could be achieved by abolishing all class distinctions, the Bolsheviks confiscated and collectivized the farms of prosperous Ukrainian kulaks—resulting in the mass starvation of millions. Again, equality imposed by government fiat only made everyone equally miserable.

Jesus addressed the subject of equality in simple fashion: “For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good” (Mk. 14:7). Jesus outlined two facts of life here: First, absolute equality is an unattainable goal. Every human being is unique (1 Cor. 12), with different talents, character traits, intelligence levels, motivations, and so forth. Given this wide range of raw materials, it is not realistic to expect perfect equality of outcomes. If we forcibly make everyone equal, within a generation or two inequality will raise its ugly head again as our innate differences assert themselves. Second, the best way to mitigate the suffering of the poor is by the *voluntary* charity of those with the means to do so—and that is the job of the gospel, not government.

— David King