

SECURED TRANSACTIONS AND PERSONAL EXEMPTIONS, Part 4 On 2 Corinthians 9:12-15

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In Part 3, I concluded that Old Testament law relating to secured transactions and personal exemptions plus prophetic elaborations and comments from the Writings authorizes a current legal regime that provides for the same. But what, if anything, do these old laws say to us?

The New Testament does not directly refer to either the Exodus or Deuteronomy passages we read in Part 2. These passages reflect God's deep concern for the poor. He is concerned to protect the poor not only from commercial exploitation, or from life-threatening pressures from lenders, or from invasion of their privacy. But the poor are also protected because of the vertical duty we owe to God. These laws benefiting the poor were not merely examples of charity, but they were an opportunity for obedience before God.

Paul alludes to this aspect of what is commonly called "charity" in 1 Corinthians 9. The church in Jerusalem was undergoing hard economic times. So Paul orchestrated an offering from all the Gentile churches where he had ministered for the relief of the Christians in the "mother church." We can read in Galatians 2:10 that James, Peter and John urged the needs of the Jerusalem Christians on Paul: "They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do." We see Paul's response first in 1 Corinthians 16:1-3:

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.

But look at how he addresses this gift in 2 Corinthians:

For the administration of this service [i.e., the gift from the gentile churches] not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men, and by their

prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Paul regards the money he is collecting from the Gentile churches not merely as producing human gratitude but also as proof of obedience to the Gospel of Christ. Whenever and wherever the Gospel has gone out, the faithful have emphasized the priority of good works, especially works of compassion toward the needy. From Basil of Caesarea, who established the world's first non-ambulatory-care hospitals to Corrie ten Boom, whose family helped save Jews from the Nazis, Christians have been called to be living symbols of God's justice, mercy, and compassion.

The greatest threat to America is not the ACLU, Planned Parenthood, or violence on TV — the greatest threat is a Christian church without a concern for justice, mercy, or corporate humility. In a culture saturated with self-improvement and self-sufficiency, Christians are called to reach down, dirty our hands — to minister to those who have hit bottom. We are called to feed the hungry, to visit orphans and widows, and to have compassion for all who are in need. Those good works will never be criminalized.