

STUDY 13

Leviticus 25:36

Take no usury or interest from him; but fear your God, that your brother may live with you.

Read the context: Leviticus 25:35-38

What kind of person is being dealt with in this paragraph (verse 35)? How has he become that way (same verse)? The Hebrew word there has the meaning of fallen, shaken, waver, sliding, slipping, to be carried or cast out of course. In other words, poverty has come through some turn of circumstances. What does verse 35 say we should do for a person like that?

Then it goes on to say, “that he may live with you.” I don’t think that means that the person or family should move in with you (though I suppose at times that could be the appropriate or needed help), but often a person who fell into poverty would have to look for work or sell themselves as an indentured servant to someone in a foreign country in order to make a living. God is telling His people to help them out like we would a stranger or a sojourner who has come to our country seeking asylum or an opportunity for a better life.

Given the context of the paragraph, what kind of help was being given? In verses 36 and 37 what is God saying we should not do? The KJV and the NKJV use the word usury. What does that mean? If they sold the poor person food, what were they not to do in the sale? See also Exodus 22:25 and Deuteronomy 23:19: If we lend to the poor, what are we not to do?

In our verse for the day, the reason or motivation given for not over-charging the poor or charging them interest on a loan is the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord acts as a check to our natural propensity toward greed, toward taking advantage of others, toward making a buck off of others – especially those who are “down on their luck,” and toward making the most of the situation. In short, the fear of the Lord reins in our self-centeredness.

But the fear of the Lord reins in more than that. What attitudes are we disposed to having toward the poor or to someone who has had a business failure?

Read Deuteronomy 15:7-11. What do these verses warn us against (verses 7, 9, 10)? How are we prone to act toward the poor? Notice that these verses say this is evil. Here again it is a matter of the heart and another instance of a hard heart. What reveals a hard heart according to this passage? What attitude does God want us to have toward the poor? Read these verses in different translations to see other synonyms for what attitudes we are warned against and what attitudes we should have.

Look up these other verses about how we should treat the poor. What are the wrong attitudes, and what are right attitudes? I John 3:17-18, Proverbs 14:21, Proverbs 16:19, James 2:1-13. Oh, how easy it is for us to close our eyes and ears, to pretend not to notice or to think that it’s not

STUDY 13

our problem. How readily we look down our noses at the poor, treat them with disdain and arrogance, shove them aside and sidle up to the rich. God forgive us.

Proverbs 14:31, Proverbs 17:5, Proverbs 19:17, and Matthew 25:37-40 tell us how God identifies with the poor. Write down what these verses tell you about God and our relationship to Him.

Here are a couple verses that don't mention the fear of the Lord, but they should strike the fear of the Lord in us: Proverbs 21:13, Proverbs 28:27. It is like a loving parent soberly warning a child of consequences if they choose to violate one of the rules of the household. Treatment of the poor is one of the rules of God's Kingdom.

As with Leviticus 25:17, we see again that the fear of the Lord is not just a vertical command, governing only our relationship with God; but the fear of the Lord is to affect our relationships or treatment of others. It is the worldview of the Kingdom of God and of His Christ.

Add to your list of what the fear of the Lord is and what effects it has in our lives.

Pray over your own attitude toward the poor and needy and how God might have you serve them out of the fear of the Lord.

For more study on what the Bible has to say about the poor check out these websites:

<http://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/poor.htm>

<http://www.zompist.com/meetthepoor.html>