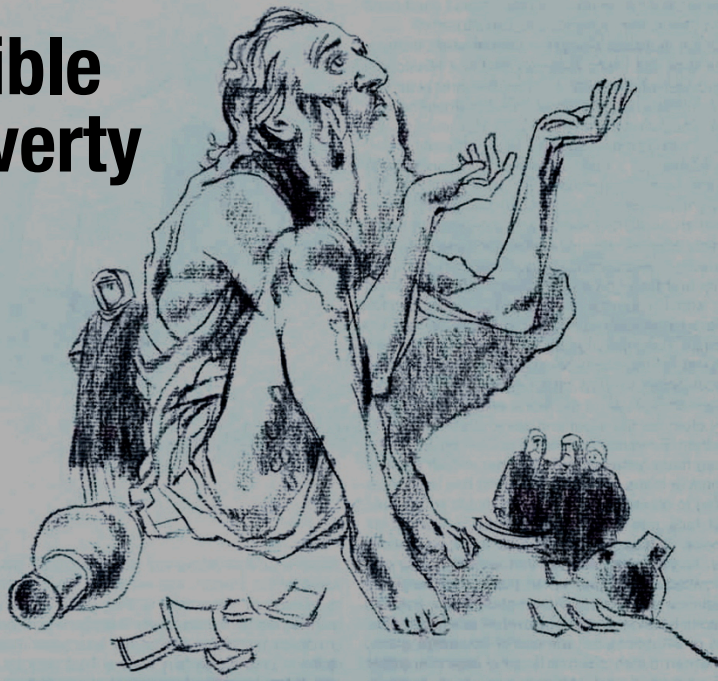


The Bible on Poverty



Three dimensions of poverty

- 1. The material** - not able to afford access to basics - food, shelter, etc.
- 2. Social** - not connected to a supportive community or the social structures of power
- 3. Spiritual** - not empowered from within to experience personal dignity, power, and hope from a relationship with God and His people.

Leviticus 19:15

“You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be **partial to the poor** or **defer to the great**, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.”

Proverbs 29:7

“The righteous is concerned for **the rights of the poor**; the wicked does not understand such concern.”

Proverbs 14:31

“He who **oppresses a poor** man insults his Maker, but he who is **kind to the needy** honors Him.”

Isaiah 10

“¹ Woe to those who make **unjust laws**, to those who issue **oppressive decrees**, ² to **deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed** of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless.”

Acts 2:44

“All those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; and they began to sell their property and possessions, and **share them with all, as anyone might have need.**”

Thessalonians 3:7-12

“For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: **If any one will not work, let him not eat.** For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living.”

Biblical principles

- ✓ *The Biblical instruction on social ethics centers attention on relationships within the **Covenant Community of Faith**.*
- ✓ *There are **several causes** of poverty mentioned in the Scriptures, and various causes require differing reactions from the Lord's followers.*
- ✓ ***God has a special interest** in all who are powerless and vulnerable (including and especially the materially poor).*
- ✓ *The Bible assumes the ownership of private property and calls for **personal, concrete action** by individuals on behalf of the poor.*

Biblical principles

- ✓ *In the teachings of Jesus, all temporal concerns fade into the background when compared to the **eternal issues** of life, death, judgment, and salvation.*
- ✓ *Since the Fall, **all institutions are flawed**, and can never of themselves bring society to some state of utopian perfection.*
- ✓ ***Justice** is a central theme in the Biblical teaching on poverty. God warns against granting special favors to the rich and powerful, and also prohibits giving special treatment to the poor.*
- ✓ *The term, "**profit**" is not the six-letter obscenity it is often pictured to be, but is an important cog in the free-market system and viewed as a positive blessing in Scripture.*

Points of tension in addresses poverty

Spiritual needs - Physical needs

Church family - Human family

Individual freedom - Community equality

Equality of opportunity - Equality of outcome

Short term relief - Long term recovery

Domestic needs - International needs

A socialist society
is willing to sacrifice individual
liberty and material productivity
for material and social equality.

A capitalist society
is willing to sacrifice material and
social equality for individual
liberty and material productivity.

The religious left is tempted to.

- 1) Give the state a Messianic role in the lives of people.
The state functions as the source of life.
- 3) Define the human dilemma in material terms.
“Salvation = more money and education.”
- 5) Promote the Kingdom without the King. “Ethics is
about saving bodies more than souls.”
- 7) Promote community apart from the Spirit of Christ.
- 9) See the poor as (primarily) victims of the “greedy” rich
and a capitalistic system that takes unfair advantage of
them. “The poor need a hand and a handout.”
- 6) Wealth is not created it is divided. “As the rich get
richer it is always at the expense of the poor.”

The religious right is tempted to.

- 1) Make uncritical nationalism a sacred calling.
- 3) Define God's blessing in terms of personal peace, material prosperity, and social excitement.
- 5) Promote the King without the Kingdom. "Ethics is about saving souls not bodies."
- 7) Promote individualism, autonomy, and privacy apart from self-sacrificing service of others.
- 9) See the poor as (primarily) lazy and irresponsible who could change their state if they would only work harder and smarter. "The poor need only an opportunity."
- 6) Wealth is created. "The fact that some get rich has little or no negative effect on those who do not."

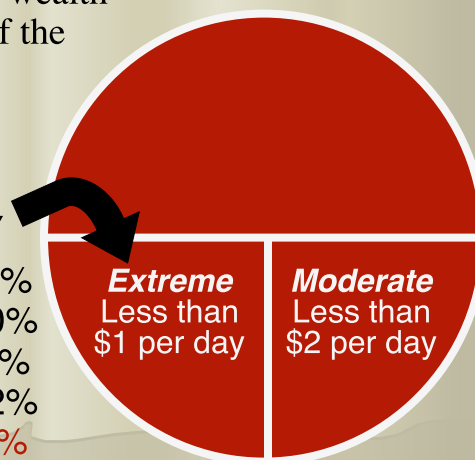
World population and income

Source: World Bank

The 500 wealthiest people in the world match the wealth of 50% (3 billion) of the world's people.

% earning - \$1 per day

Sub-Saharan Africa	48%
South Asia	40%
East Asia & Pacific	15%
Latin America	12%
USA	1%



International strategies

- ✓ **Civil rights.** Promoting the rights of women and children in third world countries would make a big difference.
- ✓ **Sanitation.** Clean water is perhaps the single biggest and solvable problem in the third world.
- ✓ **Capitalism.** Developing competitive (free) markets has proven to be the single best mechanism for creating wealth.
- ✓ **Representative and responsible government.** Corrupt government is a mammoth problem in the third world.
- ✓ **Emergency aid.** Prompt, generous, well directed aid from wealthy countries is needed to meet temporal crises.

How is poverty measured?

(2000 figures)

- ✓ **Absolute** or the official measure - (cost of basic diet x 3 + inflation = **11% of the population**) *more sensitive to economic growth*
For a family of 4 = \$16,660 in annual income
- ✓ **Relative** or comparative disadvantage (50% of median family income = **17% of the population**) *more sensitive to income inequality*
For a family of 4 = \$25,283 in annual income
- ✓ **Quasi-relative** or The Nat. Academy of Sciences (a more sophisticated combination of the above = **14% of the population**).

Characteristics of the economically poor in America

Dropping out of high school (36%)

Having children out of wedlock

Single female with children (46%)

Black (30%), Hispanic (31%), or Native American (26%)

Children under 18 years of age (22%) and elderly over 65 years of age (22%)

From a poor home

*Source: 2001 Current Population Survey
annual Demographic Supplement data*

Who pays income tax and how much do they pay?

Percentiles ranked by AGI	AGI threshold on percentiles	Percentage of Federal personal income tax paid.
Top 1%	\$295,495	34.27
Top 5%	\$130,080	54.36
Top 10%	\$94,891	65.84
Top 25%	\$57,343	83.88
Top 50%	\$29,019	96.54
Bottom 50%	-\$29,019	3.46

American government posture toward poverty

Breakdown by Anti-Poverty Category	2001	2005	Increase
Health Care Assistance	\$133,073	\$186,849	40%
Food Assistance	\$34,053	\$50,833	49%
Housing Assistance	\$30,091	\$37,899	29%
Cash & Other Assistance	\$88,496	\$121,353	37%
Total Anti-Poverty spending (millions)	\$285,713	\$396,934	39%

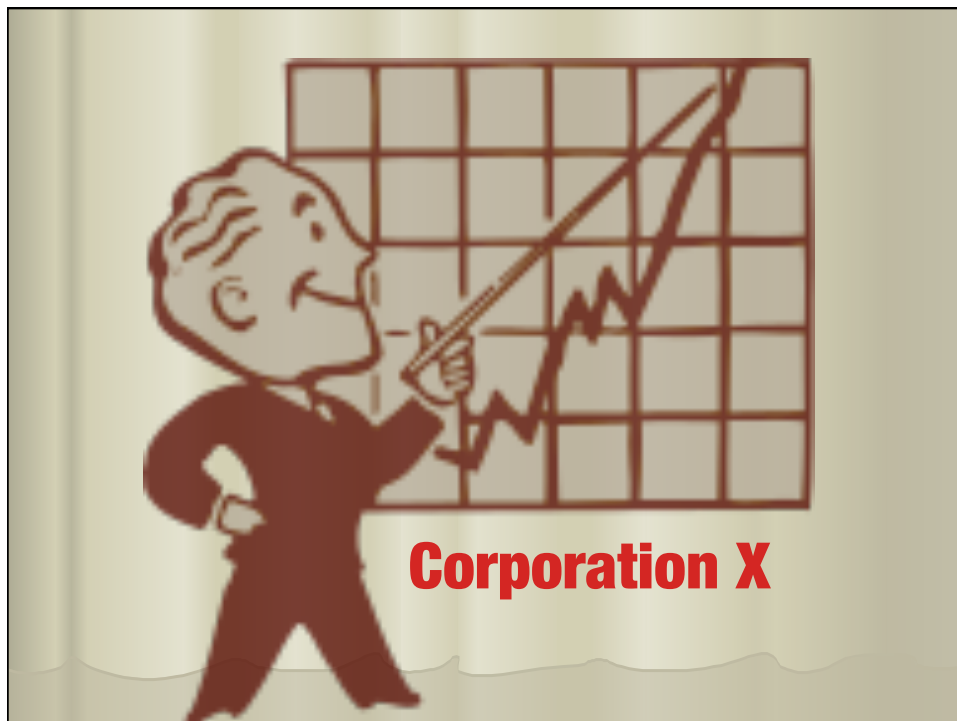
Charitable giving in America

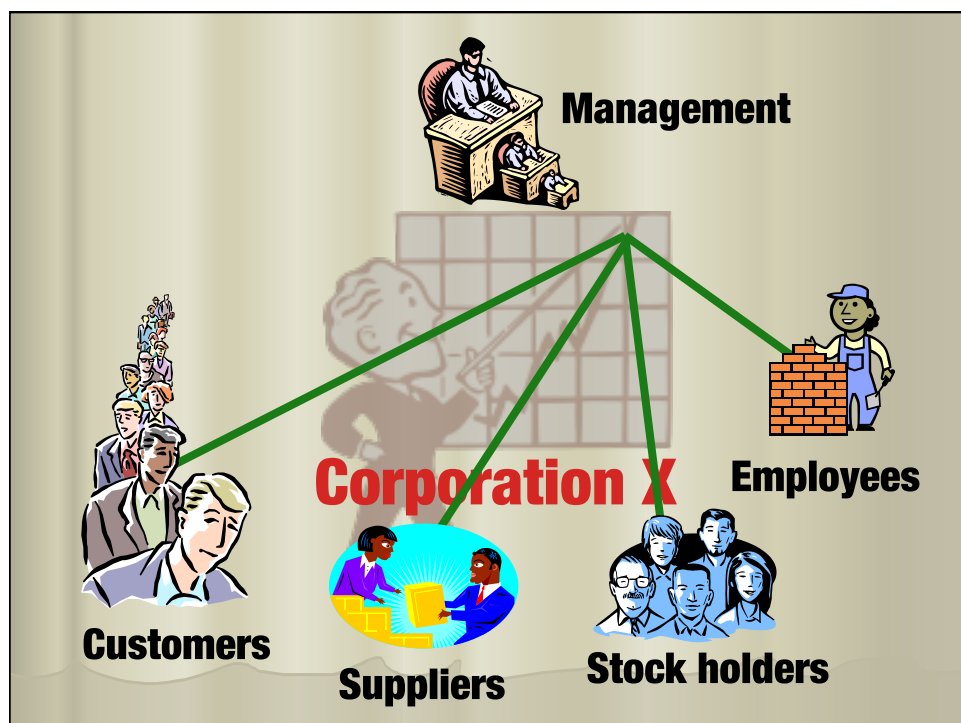
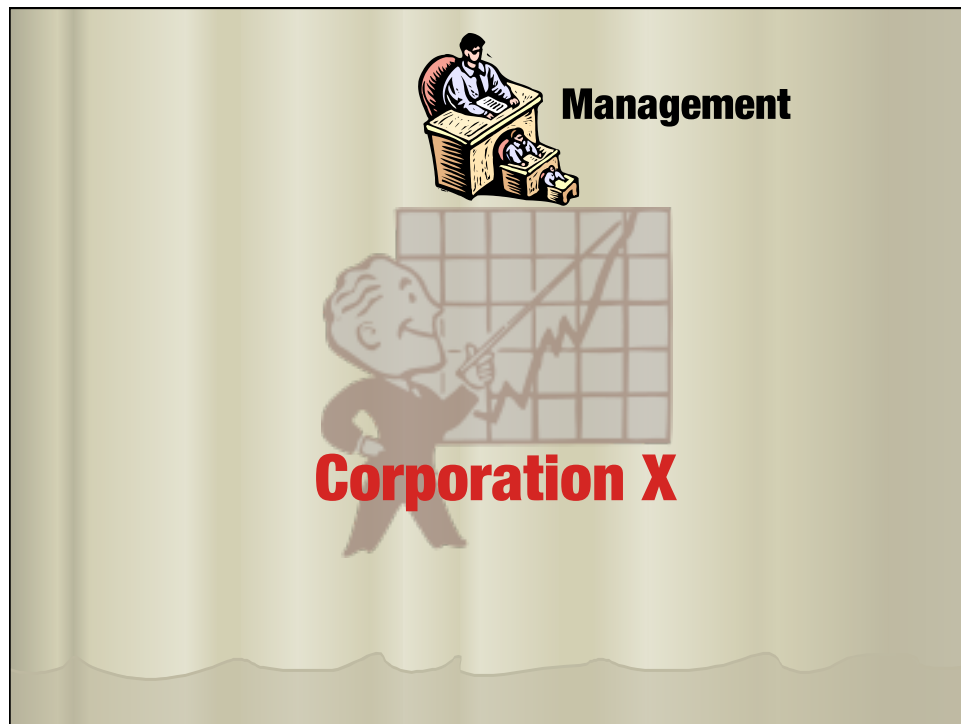
All Charitable giving	\$249,000 (millions)
Individuals	\$188,000
Foundations	\$29,000
Corporations	\$12,000
Other	\$21,000
Recipients	
Religion	\$88,000
Education	\$34,000
Other	\$27,000

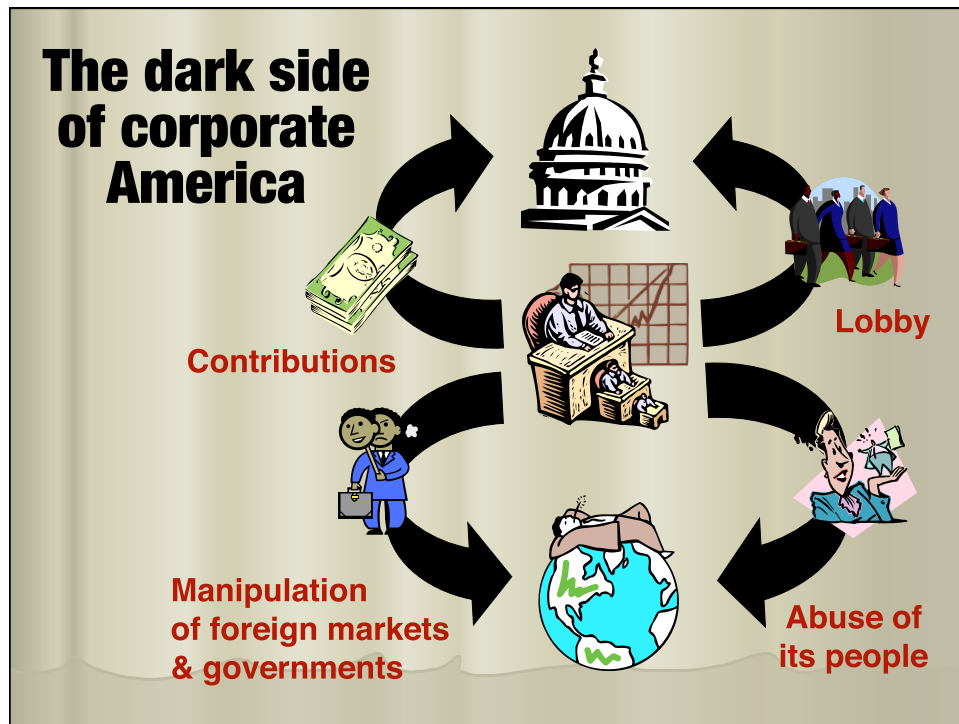
89% of American households give an average of \$1,620 per year.
Total giving has increased in 39 out of the last 40 years.

Common misconceptions

- ✓ **“Live simply so others can simply live.”** My consumption or lack thereof may do little to address the real problem.
- ✓ **The rich prosper at the expense of the poor.** The size of the pie can increase in a healthy economy.
- ✓ **Capitalism = greed and exploitation of the poor.** Capitalism is a key to addressing poverty but it can be abused.
- ✓ **Government is the answer to social injustice.** Government can be an important part of the answer but more often it promises more than it delivers.
- ✓ **Big business is the problem.** Big business involves all strata of society.







“For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: If any one will not work, let him not eat. For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living.” **2 Thessalonians 3:10-12**

Challenges

- ✓ **Intentionality.** The Christian community needs to be intentional in its dealing with wealth and poverty.
- ✓ **The Saints.** The Christian community needs to start by being a model of caring for the vulnerable in the way it treats its members.
- ✓ **All mankind.** As citizens of this democratic republic and the world we are to “do good to all men.”
- ✓ **Broad perspective.** Don’t oversimplify the problem. Face the tensions and competing interests with a realistic (not idealistic) perspective.

Challenges

- ✓ **Respect and dignity.** Focus attention on restoring and preserving personal dignity not just giving money.
- ✓ **Bipartisan.** Both the political right and left need to do more listening, less competing, and refocus on public service.
- ✓ **The family.** Promote and support the traditional marriage and family.
- ✓ **The economy.** Promote and support a growing economy.
- ✓ **The middle class.** Promote and support a healthy and growing economic middle class.