

Proverbs Chapters 14-16: The Wise Worker is Just

According to the Book of Proverbs, caring for the poor is a matter of justice. First, the proverbs recognize that people are often poor because the rich and powerful defraud or oppress them. Or, if they were already poor, they have become easy targets for further fraud and oppression. This is abhorrent to God and he will bring judgment against those who do it.

Second, even if you have not defrauded or oppressed the poor, God's justice requires that you do what you can to set things right for them, beginning with meeting their immediate needs.

To regard helping the needy as a matter of justice, not merely generosity, is no surprise if we remember that wisdom rests on the fear of the Lord. That is, wisdom consists of living in awe of God so that we seek to do what he desires for the world. God is just. God desires that the poor be cared for and poverty be eliminated. If we truly love God, then we will care for those whom God loves. Therefore, to relieve the poor and to work to eliminate poverty are matters of justice.

Regrettably, some businesses today seem to lack the imagination or skill needed to operate in ways that benefit shareholders while also benefiting the people around them. Examples include companies attempting to defraud or oppress the poor, pressuring poor and powerless people into selling property below its full value, taking advantage of ignorance or misinformation to sell questionable products, and wringing excessive short-term profits from those who are vulnerable or who lack alternatives.

Why do such companies believe that grabbing wealth from others is the only—or best—way to make a profit? Is there any evidence that a zero-sum approach to business actually improves shareholder return? How many of these practices really lead to higher long-term profitability or power? Quite the opposite: the best businesses succeed because they find a sustainable way to produce goods and services that benefit customers and society, while providing an excellent return to employees, shareholders and lenders. Businesses and other organizations that meet social needs have an advantage when they need community support, worker commitment and social protection from economic, political, and competitive threats.

In many ways, wise businesses as well as wise workers should heed the wisdom of Proverbs when it comes to justice.