

## Raising Falling Hands

*If your brother becomes destitute and cannot sustain himself among you, you are to support him as a foreigner or temporary resident, so that he can continue to live among you. Do not profit or take interest from him, but fear your God and let your brother live among you. You are not to lend him your silver with interest or sell him your food for profit. - Leviticus 25:35-37 HCSB*



With so much poverty in the world, how do we decide who to help? What should be the goal of our assistance? What measurable marker can we use to know where and when to draw those lines?

The phrase “cannot sustain himself” here in the Holman is in Hebrew rendered “mowt yad”<sup>1</sup> which can be literally translated “if your brother’s...hand falls.” Basically, as long as someone’s hand is yet raised, as long as they are still making some kind of effort, there is yet hope for them. A fundamental principle of economic justice is to not allow the poor to so extend themselves that they “fall” and are no longer able to help themselves.

Think of a heavily laden animal. As long as the beast can still stand under its burden, a child can lead it. Allow

that same beast to collapse under its load however, and not even five grown men can raise that same animal.<sup>2</sup>

In a materialistic and capitalistic nation like ours, the Bible’s command for the empathetic treatment of the poor sounds strange and vaguely utopian. However, to Yahweh it matters little whether the poor is native, a foreigner or a temporary resident. This social and economic principle transcends the artificial boundaries of nations and states. It involves the proverbial “milk of human kindness.”

The task the Lord sets before us is not to enrich our brother. The goal is not, like many of our society’s social programs do, to reward laziness. We must not allow the unscrupulous to manipulate the system in such a way that their supposed “handicaps” are used as a way to abuse the funds legitimately given by caring people.

The task set before us is to snatch our poor from the desperate edge of abject poverty. It is to allow our fellow human being, who was also created in the image of God, to maintain some degree of human dignity.

I recently heard of a credit card scheme to deliberately set about getting those shackles into the hands of the poor but to increase the interest rates on them in order to compensate for the company’s “greater risk.” This directly contradicts the will of God. We are not to profit off the questionable judgment of the poor.

The Lord told Ezekiel that a person who doesn’t lend at interest or for profit but keeps his hand from wrongdoing and carries out true justice between men follows the Lord’s statutes and keeps His ordinances, acting faithfully. He said that such a person is righteous and will certainly live.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Strong’s #4131 + 3027

<sup>2</sup> Sifra Leviticus on 25:35-38

<sup>3</sup> Ezekiel 18:8-9 cp Psalm 51