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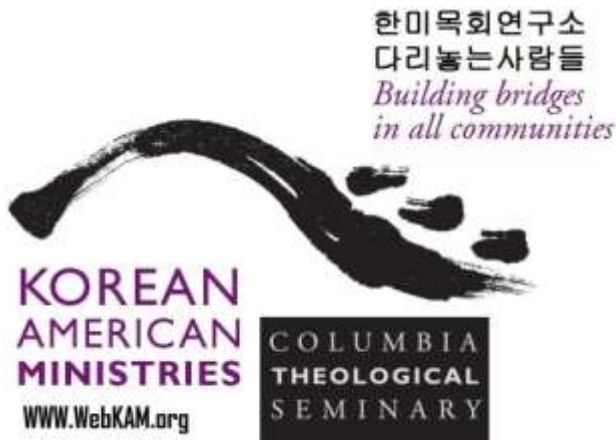
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Editor and Publisher

Paul Junggap Huh, Ph. D.
Columbia Theological Seminary
Decatur, Georgia

Co-Editor

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Assistant Editor

Hyun Ho Park
Atlanta Bethany U. M. Church
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For any questions, subscription, and
articles please contact:

Tel. 404-687-4538

E-mail: huhp@ctsnet.edu

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COLUMBIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Korean American Ministries
701 S. Columbia Dr.
P.O. Box 520
Decatur, Georgia 30031
www.webkam.org

Beatitudes Revisited: Blessings to the Poor and Woes to the Rich

Hyun Ho Park¹

1. Korean 95 Theses

October 31st, 2008, in Pusan, Korea, a group of people eager to reform churches in Korea presented “95 Theses for the Reformation of Korean Church.”² It was the very same day that Martin Luther sent to Albert of Mainz his copy of “Disputation of Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences” later known as “The Ninety-Five Theses” 491 years ago. In the new 95 theses, they admit that the Korean Church is corrupted and lost the power to transform the society, because it refused to implement the teachings of the Bible. They lay out, therefore, new imperatives that the Korean Church should embrace at the doctrinal level as well as at the practical level.

Among those 95 theses, I believe, it is necessary to point out theses related to the material possessions, because it is one of places where Korean Church is most severely criticized. The building project of mega churches often becomes an issue in Korean newspapers. The huge farewell gift for retiring pastors of those churches is also not an exception. The hereditary succession of Senior Pastors became an accepted phenomenon among their own circles despite criticisms from the majority of clergies and lay people. We see that there is a common issue that undergoes all these problems: money.

To reform the use of money in Korean Church, these Korean reformers present seven theses dedicated to this issue in particular from 29 to 35:

29. We believe that the Korean Church should apply the ethic of the Beatitudes, its spirituality, concern for the poverty and justice, and the preservation of created order.

¹ Hyun Ho Park is a graduate of Candler School of Theology, Emory University, M.Div., Th.M., and a youth pastor at Bethany Korean United Methodist Church, Suwanee, Georgia. pastorpeterpark@gmail.com

² For the full text, visit <http://www.dangdangnews.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=8296>

30. We hope that the Korean Church eagerly helps the poor, the alienated, and the oppressed.

31. We believe that the Korean Church should participate in the movement to implement the system of the common sharing of the land according to the law of Jubilee.

32. We asked that the Korean Church becomes a community of equality where the rich share their possessions with the poor.

33. We do not regard an unearned income that Korean mega churches made through speculative investment in real estate as God's blessing.

34. We refuse the accumulation of wealth by the Korean Church.

35. We shall seek the spirituality of voluntary poverty and participate in world poverty.

In the 29th theses, they make clear that their economic reform in Korean Church is based on the Beatitude, especially its concern for the poverty and justice. Then, the following questions should be asked: “What is the vision of economy that Jesus talks about in the Beatitudes?” “In this new economic vision, what is the mandate that Christians should follow?” This paper is an attempt to answer those questions especially through the reading of Luke’s Gospel. The primary goal of this study, however, is the enlightenment of individuals rather than the Korean Church, because the change of community takes place, only when its members begin to change. This awareness brings us to our starting point, the teaching of the Beatitudes in the Korean Church.

2. The Teaching of the Beatitudes in the Korean Church

There is a reductionist tendency in teaching the Beatitudes in Korean churches. They teach only one version of the Beatitudes, and barely the other: Matthean beatitudes are preferred while Lucan beatitudes are neglected. Most church members remember that the Beatitudes start with “Blessed are the poor in spirit” as in Matthew rather than “Blessed are you who are poor” as in Luke. Because of this strong Matthean voice, people sometimes even forget that there are beatitudes in Luke’s Gospel.

There could be various reasons for this. First, Matthew has a longer version of the Beatitudes, 9 beatitudes, while Luke has a shorter version, only 4 beatitudes. Second, Matthew’s Beatitudes are followed by a long teaching of Jesus called the Sermon on the

Mount (Matthew 5-7. 111 verses), while Luke's beatitudes are followed by a shorter teaching called the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:20-49. 30 verses). Third, Matthew's Beatitudes invoke so-called religious sensitivity, because it focuses the condition of the heart – "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3); "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matthew 5:6).

However, the issue is not simply why one version of the Beatitudes is preferred over the other. Rather, it is what is missing from the other, what Luke's version of the beatitudes says, and its mandate, what Luke's Beatitudes require of us. Therefore, it is necessary to find out the difference between Matthean Beatitudes and Lucan Beatitudes, and what Jesus requires of his disciples in Luke's Gospel. In doing so, I will argue that *according to Luke's Gospel, the blessedness is the given condition for the poor, while woes for the rich, and in order for the rich to enter the kingdom of God they have to share their possessions with the poor.*

3. The Blessings to the Poor

In Lucan beatitudes, Jesus presents a new economic vision that the poor become rich and the rich become poor in their blessedness. A redaction study of Luke 6:20-23 shows that *in Luke the blessedness is the given condition for the poor disciples.* In other words, in Luke Jesus identifies the poverty of his disciples with blessedness. In Luke, first, the audience of Jesus' teaching is his disciples, "Then he looked up at his disciples and said" (Luke 6:20), while in Matthew it is crowds and his disciples, "When Jesus saw the crowds...his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak" (Matthew 5:1-2).

Second, the poor are among his disciples, as Luke uses second person pronoun, "Blessed are *you* who are poor" (Luke 6:20). They are hungry now (Luke 6:21). They do not hunger and thirst for righteousness as in Matthew (Matthew 5:6). They are blessed not because righteousness will be fulfilled for them, but because their empty bellies will be filled (Luke 6:21. Cf. Matthew 5:6). In this sense, it is appropriate to read the third beatitude in the same manner. They are weeping now, because they are poor and hungry, but they will laugh, because theirs is the kingdom of God, and they will be filled (Luke 6:21. Cf. Luke 6:20-21). This is good news which Jesus mentioned in his inaugural

address at Nazareth: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring *good news to the poor*” (Luke 4:18). They are blessed despite their poverty.³

This ironical conclusion brings the third feature of the Lucan beatitudes: in Luke blessedness is not the future condition that will be given but the present reality which has been already given to the poor among Jesus’ disciples. They are blessed, not because the kingdom of heaven will be theirs, but because it *is* theirs (Luke 6:20). They are the blessed, not only because they will be filled and laugh, but also because they are hungry and weeping *now* (Luke 6:21). Though Luke connects their blessedness to their future condition which will be inverted, his focus is the present. This becomes more obvious, when we compare Luke with Matthew. Matthew does not use “now” (Matthew 5:6) but constantly use future indicative “they will...” (Matthew 5:4, 5, 7, 8, 9). In other words, blessedness in Matthew is leaned more toward the future, whereas in Luke toward present.

Fourth, the poor are even identified with Jesus as prophets. One of Luke’s literary skills that he uses in his Gospel and Acts of Apostles is that he describes Jesus as a rejected prophet. Like Elijah and Elisha who were rejected by his own people, Jesus is rejected by his own townsmen from the beginning of his ministry in his inaugural address at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30). Even in our text, Luke 6:20-26, Luke describes Jesus delivering his message, as if he gives a prophetic address by adding “And he lifted up his eyes on.”⁴ Jesus weeps over Jerusalem and prophesizes its destruction, because it rejected him: “You did not recognize the time of your visitation from God” (Luke 19:44). Luke makes it more explicit in Acts. Jesus is a prophet like Moses: “Moses said, ‘the Lord your God will raise up for you from your own people a prophet like me’” (Acts 3:22); “Jesus

³ Identity of the poor is discussed among scholars. Some see the poor as pious (M. Dibelius & W. Sattler), a particular social group, ‘amme ha’aretz (H.L. Strack & P. Billerbeck), those who have left all (K. Schubert), heirs of salvation (A.R.C. Leaney, & J. Dupont & H. Schurmann), and Israel (D.P. Seccombe). For more detail for the identity of the poor, see David Peter Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor in Luke-Acts* (Linz: Studien Zum Neuen Testament und Seiner Umwelt, 1982), 23-43. The poor in Luke, however, should be taken literally, as Evans sees the poor as “the materially poor”: “When taken with the corresponding woe in 6:24 it is likely to do so – cf. the parable in 16:19-31, where v. 25 exactly reproduces the teaching of this beatitude and the woe, and there ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ have no moral connotation.” C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke* (TPI New Testament Commentaries; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 329. How Luke connects the condition of one’s material wealth with one’s blessedness and acceptance to the Kingdom of God will be discussed in the later part of this article.

⁴ “A solemn expression, elsewhere in the NT (16:23, 18:13, John 17:1) of looking up to heaven. It focuses attention on the disciples as the recipients of a prophetic address. In Matt. 5:1 Jesus sits as a teacher” C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke*, 328.

of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you” (Acts 2:22).⁵ As Jesus was rejected and suffered by his own people as a prophet, they are hated, excluded, reviled, and defamed (Luke 6:22). In other words, they share the destiny of prophets, which is rejection. Therefore, they also share rewards of prophets in heaven: “For surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets” (Luke 6:23).

4. The Woes to the Rich

A comparative study of Luke 6:24-26 shows that *in Luke woes are the given condition for the rich disciples*. Though there is no parallel pericope in Matthew for Luke 6:24-26, the message of the woes becomes clear when we parallel Luke 6:24-26 with Luke 6:20-23, the Lucan beatitudes. It shows that, first, there are the rich as well as the poor among Jesus’ disciples. Luke keeps second person pronoun, *you*, in lips of Jesus: “But, woe to *you* who are rich” (Luke 6:24). He does not use third person pronoun as in Matthew. In other words, it is a direct speech to his audience encompassing the rich as well as the poor.

Second, Luke composed the following woes in response to his beatitudes. Luke gives four woes, after he gives four beatitudes. Furthermore, contents of woes are paralleled with contents of beatitudes. 1. The rich are cursed, for they have received their consolation (Luke 6:24). But, the poor are blessed for theirs is the kingdom of God (Luke 6:20). 2. The rich who are full now are cursed, for they will be hungry (Luke 6:25). But, the poor who are hungry now are blessed, for they will be filled (Luke 6:21). 3. The rich who are laughing now are cursed, for they will mourn and weep (Luke 6:25). But, the poor who are weeping now are blessed, for they will laugh (Luke 6:21). 4. Those who all speak well of them are cursed, for that is the sign of the false prophets (Luke 6:26). But, those who all speak against are blessed, for that is the sign of the prophets. Remembering

⁵ Acts 2:22 is paralleled with Deuteronomy 34:10-12: “Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt...and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.” For more detail in prophetic structure of Luke-Acts, see Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Sacra Pagina 3; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 17-21.

that Matthew has no woes at all, it is highly plausible to conclude that Luke 6:24-26 is Luke's own composition based on Luke 6:20-23 that came from his source, Q.

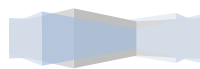
Third, the message of woes to the rich is amplified by stories in Luke's Gospel narrative. In Luke's Infancy Narrative, Mary praises God, because God brings down the powerful but lifts up the lowly, and fills the hungry with good things but sends the rich away empty (Luke 1:53-54). In Luke 12:16-21, the rich is depicted as a fool storing up treasures only for himself not being rich toward God (Luke 12:20-21). In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man ends up going to Hades, while Lazarus, the beggar ends up being with Abraham (Luke 16:19-31). The rich ruler cannot follow Jesus and inherit eternal life, because he is very rich (Luke 18:18-23). Jesus even says, "Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:24). In other words, Luke 6:24-26 is not just a teaching of Jesus giving woes to the rich but an outline of Luke's gospel that will take place later in his Gospel narrative.

Fourth, the rich are in the cursed condition in the present. They are already cursed for they have already received their consolation (Luke 6:24). Those who are full and laughing *now* are cursed, because that is the very sign that they will be hungry, mourning, and weeping (Luke 6:25). Those whom people speak well of them are cursed, because it means that they are false prophets (Luke 6:26). In other words, divine reversal has already occurred in the preaching of Jesus, because the present condition dictates the future condition.⁶

But, following questions still remain. Then, there is no way for the rich to be blessed? Is it absolutely impossible for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God? Material blessing inevitably brings spiritual curse? Does Luke not give any way out for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God? The second half of this article is dedicated to exploring the only way that Luke presents for the rich to overturn their present cursedness into blessedness.

5. Sharing of Possessions

⁶ Inaugural address at Nazareth also shows that the preaching of Jesus is not a simple preaching but the fulfillment of it: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21).



The mandate which Luke gives for the rich to enter the kingdom of God is this: *They have to share their possessions with the poor*. Though Luke does not put this mandate directly in the lips of Jesus, he makes it explicit through the teachings and stories of Jesus. First, in Luke, giving up one's possessions is the cost of discipleship: "So, therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions" (Luke 14:33). Matthew, while containing hating one's family, does not connect discipleship with giving up one's possessions (Matthew 10:37-38). On the contrary, for Luke, this is an essential condition for discipleship, as he reinforces this point by two preceding parables, the parable of building a tower and the parable of the king waging war, which are uniquely Lucan, and he ends those parables with a concluding remarks, *therefore* (Luke 14:28-32). Now, the message is clear. They have to count the cost before they begin to follow Jesus. That is to give up all their possessions.

Second, therefore, storing up one's possessions and using them for themselves are considered to be evil. In the parable of the Rich Fool, Luke 12:13-21, Luke depicts a greedy person who stores up treasures for himself. His plan for the future building larger barns and enjoying life is in vain, if God takes his life away over night. Though there seems no problem in his outward action, he is called to be a fool, because he plans to use all his possessions only for himself and is not rich toward God. He has to store up treasures for God. It is necessary, therefore, to read the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Luke 16:19-31, which is another Lucan story, in the same manner. Though there seems no immoral action on his side, except wearing fine linen and feasting every day, the rich ends up going to Hades. His life is evil, because he uses his possessions only for himself and neglects the poor and needy Lazarus. But then, how can the rich be rich toward God? How can they be with Abraham after they died?

Third, sharing one's possessions is the condition for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. There are three stories that need our attention: the rich ruler (Luke 18:18-30), Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), and the unjust manager (Luke 16:1-13). In the story of the rich ruler, even after keeping the commandments, he still lacks one thing to inherit eternal life. He has to sell his possessions and distribute the money to the poor (Luke 18:22). With this story, Luke makes following three points explicit. First, it is not just "what you own" as in Mark but "*all* that you own" that he has to sell and distribute to the poor.

Though he is “very rich”, he has to give up all his possessions (Luke 18:23. Cf. Mark 10:21).⁷ Second, storing up treasure in heaven is possible through sharing one’s possessions with the poor. Those who did it will inherit eternal life in the age to come (Luke 18:30). In other words, Luke makes what is implicit in the parable of the rich fool explicit: One can be rich toward God by distributing one’s possessions to the poor. Third, giving up one’s entire possession is a real mandate for discipleship. The mandate, which has been given in the teaching of Jesus in Luke 14:33, is actually asked. But, since he is very rich and cannot give up all his possessions, he can neither follow Christ nor become a disciple (Luke 14:27, 33). It is so difficult for the rich to give up all their possessions that Jesus even says “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God” (Luke 18:25). It seems impossible.

However, Luke does not simply give negative pictures of the rich not being able to give up their possessions and failing to enter the kingdom of God. Rather, he ends the story of the rich ruler with following words, “What is impossible for mortals is possible for God” (Luke 18:27). Furthermore, unlike Mark and Matthew who do not have an explicit example of this teaching (Mark 10:27. Matthew 19:28), Luke gives a practical example through the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10): What is impossible for mortals, which is for the rich to inherit eternal life, is made possible.

There are ample reasons supporting that the story of Zacchaeus is Luke’s answer for Luke 18:24-27.⁸ First, it’s a uniquely Lucan material. Second, it’s preceded by the story of the rich ruler. It is highly plausible that Luke, who is an expert in arranging his sources thematically in his Gospel narrative, placed this story on purpose.⁹ That is to give

⁷ Luke does not simply repeat Mark’s clause “for he had many possessions” as Matthew does. Rather, he changes it to “for he was very rich” (Luke 18:23. Cf. Mark 10:22. Matthew 19:22). In other words, Luke makes it clearer than Mark that the ruler is exceedingly rich.

⁸ Luke 18:24-26: “Jesus looked at him and said, ‘How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.’ Those who heard it said, ‘Then who can be saved?’ He replied, ‘What is impossible for mortals is possible for God.’”

⁹ Luke’s tendency to arrange his sources thematically is most evident in his travel narrative (Luke 9:51-18:14). While Matthew presents sayings and teachings of Jesus in five teaching materials (Matthew 5:1-7:29, 10:1-42, 13:1-53, 18:1-35, 24:1-25:46), Luke incorporates those teachings in his travel narrative. For example, majority of materials in the sermon of the Mount in Matthew is found in Luke 9:51-18:14. Ex. the parable of salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16. Cf. Luke 14:34-35); on anger (Matthew 5:21. Cf. Luke 12:57-59); on divorce (Matthew 5:31-32. Cf. Luke 16:18); the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9-15. Cf. Luke 11:2-4); on treasures (Matthew 6:19-21. Cf. Luke 12:33-34); the sound eye (Matthew 6:22-23. Cf. Luke 11:34-36);

an example for Luke 18:24-27. Third, therefore, Luke clearly says that Zacchaeus is rich (Luke 19:2). Fourth, his response to meeting Jesus is to share his possessions to the poor (Luke 19:8). It is radically different from that of the rich ruler. While the rich ruler fails to give up his possessions, Zacchaeus voluntarily gives the half of his possessions to the poor, even though Jesus did not even ask him.¹⁰ Furthermore, he promises to pay back four times, if he defrauds anyone of anything (Luke 19:8). Fifth, lastly, Jesus directly declares that he is saved (Luke 19:9). Now, what Luke tries to achieve is clear. It seems humanly impossible for Zacchaeus to enter the kingdom of God, because he is a tax collector, sinner, and above all rich (Luke 19:1, 7). But, what is impossible for mortals is made possible in this story. By giving up his possessions, now Zacchaeus inherits eternal life.

In the same token, the parable of the unjust manager, Luke 16:1-13, which seems problematic, can be understood. After hearing from his master that he has to leave his duty as a manager, because he wasted his master's property, he summoned his master's debtors one by one and wrote off their debts at his master's expense (Luke 16:5-7). Then, his master even praised (ἐπῆνεσεν) this seemingly unjust action. Why? The punch line of this parable is Luke 16:9, as Jesus says: "And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth." What the manager did was to let the wealth of the rich be used for the needy. In doing so, he made them his friends and prepared his future. In other words, using wealth, which means sharing one's possessions, is recommended to make friends and to secure eternal life: "they may welcome you into the eternal homes" (Luke 16:9). Again, by sharing possessions, he inherits eternal life.

words of Jesus on serving two masters (Matthew 6:24. Cf. Luke 16:13); on anxiety (Matthew 6:25-34. Cf. Luke 12:22-31); God's answering of prayer (Matthew 7:7-11. Cf. Luke 11:9-13); the golden rule (Matthew 7:12. Cf. Luke 6:31); the narrow gate (Matthew 7:13-14. Cf. Luke 13:23-24). In doing so, Luke shows his readers that those ethical demands are required for those who want to be followers of Jesus.

¹⁰ Zacchaeus does not give all his possessions to the poor. Thus, it contradicts Luke 18:22: "Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor." However, it is necessary to note that the rich ruler is called to follow Jesus, while Zacchaeus still remains in his daily routine after meeting Jesus. But, what is required in both cases is same. It is the willingness to share one's possessions. The rich ruler is reluctant to share his possessions, while Zacchaeus willingly shares his. Luke makes this explicit in Acts, as he depicts the life of believers as follows: "All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need" (Acts 2:44-45). Willingness to share one's possessions is so crucial that Ananias and Sapphira who are reluctant to share their possessions and lied to apostles are called to be liars to God and die (Acts 5:1-11).

Conclusion

This article is an attempt to find the message of the Beatitudes for the enlightenment of Korean Christians and, ultimately, for the reformation of the Korean Church. By investigating the Lucan beatitudes that are often lost or disregarded in the teaching of the Korean churches, we found the following observations. Lucan beatitudes raise questions for its readers because of its radical nature and contrast: blessedness is given to the poor, while woes are given to the rich. There is no spiritual dimension as in Matthew. The degree of one's material wealth determines one's present condition of blessedness, which will also determine one's future blessedness. The poor are blessed, while the rich are cursed, because kingdom of God is not theirs. It is almost impossible for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle (Luke 18:25).

However, it is not absolutely impossible for the rich to be blessed and to enter the kingdom of God. The rich can be saved by sharing their possessions with the poor. The rich fool in Luke 12:13-21 and the rich man in Luke 16:19-31 are condemned, because they did not share their possessions. They only used them for their benefit. The rich ruler could not follow Jesus, because he could not give his possessions to the poor. It is difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. Lucan beatitudes are correct, because they will not inherit the kingdom of God and eternal life, though they are full and laughing now. They will end up going to Hades. However, Luke shows how the humanly impossible can be made possible through the story of Zacchaeus. Though he is rich, he receives salvation by sharing his possessions to the poor. Sharing of possessions is so crucial that Luke even introduces the story of the unjust manager who uses his master's wealth to help the needy and finally prepare his eternal home.

Luke's Gospel shows what we missed to see. Sharing of possessions is a mandate for the rich who are not hungry and weep because of daily bread. They are *us*. We are the rich sitting on the plain and listening to Jesus' teaching. If we wish to enter the kingdom of God, receive salvation, and have eternal life, we have to share our possessions.

To accept our worth from God as a gift, then, means to dwell in continual nakedness before him, in the most radical form of poverty.



We stand before him always as ones who know what he knows: that our being and worth come from him alone, for by ourselves we fall into nothingness at every moment.¹¹

¹¹ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Sharing Possessions: Mandate and Symbol of Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 83.