
WHY SHOULD YOU CARE ABOUT ECONOMIC INEQUALITY?

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The prophet Amos often expressed God's anger at rich, powerful people in Israel who lived lives of luxury and indolence while exhibiting little or no concern for others existing in poverty and destitution. As Amos put it, "They are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph."

Today in the United States we have a similar situation with the top few percent of our people rising rapidly in wealth and income while most Americans languish with stagnant incomes compared to the cost of living. And what's worse, many of the super-rich seem disconnected from the effect their excessive wealth has on the remainder of the nation. Their money is electronically spread over the globe, and they have their villas in Europe and private jets to get there, so they can in reality consider themselves more as citizens of the world than as Americans.

Today I'll present five reasons why you should care about this economic inequality, even though you might not be suffering financially yourself.

The first is that humans are moral creatures and need to act in morally acceptable ways if they are to gain respect for themselves and favorable stature in the eyes of their community. The term morals arises from the sociological concept of mores, or ways of behaving considered so vital to community welfare that they are accepted without question, severely sanctioned if broken, and embodied in the basic views of the group as to what is good, or moral. It is difficult to defend the view that a few highly placed members of society should have the lion's share of resources, regardless of whether they have earned the privilege. It's equally difficult to defend that some people ought to starve and die of preventable diseases when the resources to save them exist in great quantity. So, inequality is a moral matter, whether or not it is perceived by all.

Second is that extreme inequality harms you financially more than you may realize. You may accept that your wages are stagnant, or that your standard of living is in decline. You may also accept that you have less than adequate health care, or that your taxes are what they are. But all of these factors would improve dramatically if rampant income inequality were brought under control. The rich justify their low tax rate by claiming that their extra money is invested in job creation, thus benefiting the working class. But in reality much of this extra income becomes "hot" money which flows around the earth at the stroke of a computer key creating massive instability in the world economy.

Third is that the earth is being destroyed. The idea that if you have money you can do anything because you can afford it is absolutely immoral, not to mention unsustainable. Were the two nations of India and China to rise to economic equality

with the U.S. (not close yet, in spite of all you hear), it would take five worlds to support them (and us). Obviously, this can't be, so you have to either hope that India and China get sidetracked on the development road, or realize that our profligate ways cannot continue. The earth has enough resources for our need, but not for our greed.

Fourth, it could come to haunt you. If you like political stability, please consider that great economic inequality threatens the very roots of a stable democracy. Revolutions break out over perceived inequality. In America revolution would be by ballot, not bullet; but we can't be absolutely certain what an angry, armed population without hope might do. I imagine that Czar Nicholas II and other members of the Romanov dynasty executed in their basement by their Bolshevik guards during the Russian Revolution had little understanding as to why the people were so unhappy, and could not understand what they had done to precipitate such violence. But violence often follows oppression, so beware. Think about the riots of the late 1960s.

Fifth, if you are a Christian God expects you to show concern and to advocate and act in favor of the unfortunate victims of this inequality. The apostle John writes in his three epistles that God is love and that we must express God's love in our lives if we are to please Him. He also says that "This is love, that we walk according to His commandments…(2 John 6a). If you consider that a good share of the Lord's ministry was spent among the poor and dispossessed of the day, and that many of His parables and teachings include a strong component of economic justice for these people, then we must if we call ourselves followers of Jesus act in support of victims of economic injustice in our society, and by implication against the systems and structures causing this unfortunate situation