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# JUBILEE LEVELS THE ECONOMIC PLAYING FIELD

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By Jim Jordal

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by his good conduct that his deeds are done in gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, don't boast and don't lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, sensual, and demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition are, there is confusion and every evil deed. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceful, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

James 3:13-18 (WEB)

In the reference above the apostle James advocates a lifestyle of wisdom and understanding that includes good conduct, deeds of gentleness, purity of purpose, reasonableness, acts of mercy, peaceful living in society, and good fruits, or works. The opposite behaviors—bitter jealousy, selfish ambition, boasting, telling falsehoods, confusion, and other evil deeds arise from the earthly, sensual, and demonic wisdom of this world order. James's counsel follows from the Jubilee message of the prophets who presented the earlier form of Jubilee, which was then reinforced by Jesus who added human intent and Divine grace to the mix. Wherever in Scripture you find examples and behaviors exhibiting justice and righteousness, you are seeing Jubilee principles cast in new dimensions of understanding.

Today's political candidates posture and spar over how wealth should be divided, and more specifically just how much should go to captains of industry and finance, and how much should be left for the people. An allied issue is how much of the costs of running the nation should be borne by those of great wealth. Anyone protesting the present situation in which the top one percent of Americans reaps far more than its fair share of the gains due to increasing productivity of the working class is accused of practicing "class warfare" against the rich. But, as the second wealthiest man in the country, billionaire Warren Buffet says, "Yes, it is class warfare, and my class is winning."

Try taking the words of James above and applying them to the rhetoric being heard almost daily in the news media. How much truth do you hear? How much reasonableness regarding tax policy? How much mercy for the poor and jobless? How much rank ambition and prideful boasting? How much confusion of purpose and action? Yes, James had something to say about such behavior.

God is not against rich people, as such. Many patriarchs of the Old Testament owned great possessions of land and livestock. And King Solomon was extremely wealthy as a result of God's favor in return for his faithfulness. It seems almost a self-fulfilling prophecy: Obedience to God's economic and financial laws creates a lifestyle that generates success and wealth. So don't curse the wealthy—find out first where their wealth came from and how it is used, then act accordingly.

God is against riches gained by unjust strategies like failing to pay living wages to workers, creating needless suffering for dependent people like widows and orphans, manipulation of financial markets, and refusals to pay fair-share taxation. He is even angrier at riches used by their owners to oppress the poor and unfortunate of society.

For mainstream Americans these days the economic playing field is tilted severely in favor of those already possessing great wealth and power. As you well know, the costs of traditional roads to middle class status—higher education, decent housing, adequate medical care, freedom of entry into jobs leading upward—have either been denied by discrimination or spiraling costs to large groups of our people. No, the playing field is definitely not level for most Americans.

Jubilee assigned a certain fair share of all productive resources to each citizen, thus guaranteeing everyone at least minimal earning power. Today most productive resources have fallen into the hands of the favored few that do not always use them for the benefit of society. Since we cannot easily divide natural resource deposits and large factories into pieces, except by issuing stock (which the poor cannot afford to buy), we need to look at substitutes in the form of national dividends or basic income grants for all adult citizens. Thus, every American would have access to a share of America's economic pie large enough to provide adequate sustenance and entry into the "better" life.