

***Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions.* By Craig L. Blomberg. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999, 300 pp., paperback.**

Reviewed by Brian G. Najapfour

One of the fast growing problems today is poverty. Various solutions have been tried to solve this global problem: socialism, capitalism, liberation theology, prosperity theology, and others. Yet all these attempts, according to Craig Blomberg, lack of solid scriptural supports. Several evangelical scholars have also produced works that address this whole issue of poverty,¹ but for Blomberg none of these works really provides a biblical theology of wealth and poverty.² Hence, he completed a well researched volume *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions*. In a sense this book is an attempt to offer a balanced biblical answer to this universal dilemma.

This balanced approach is already seen in the main title of Blomberg's book— *Neither Poverty nor Riches*. He obviously borrowed these words from Proverbs 30:8: “give me neither poverty nor riches.” The title implies “the principle of moderation.”³ As Blomberg notes, “one of the theses of this volume is that the avoidance of extremes of wealth and poverty is a consistent, recurring biblical mandate.”⁴ This thesis, however, does not mean that poverty or riches is *always* bad. One may be exceptionally poor and yet pious. Likewise, one may be

¹ See, for example, Ronald J. Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (1977); David Chilton's *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald J. Sider* (1981); and John Schneider's *Godly Materialism: Rethinking Money and Possessions* (1994). The last two books critique Sider's work, and Blomberg says that his initial study “led to conclusions that charted a middle ground between Sider and his critics” (p. 28).

² According to Blomberg even Gene A. Getz's *A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions* (1990) falls short of providing a real biblical theology of the subject, for, while it examines the New Testament in detail, it only examines the Old Testament in passing.

³ Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 245.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

extraordinarily wealthy and yet godly. The Bible commends both. What the Scriptures condemn is the impious impoverished as well as the unrighteous rich.

Blomberg concludes his book by urging us to have a transformation in our use of material blessings. He believes that in order to elevate poverty we need to increase our giving (or exercise what he calls “graduated tithe”). We need to give more to people who are in desperate need. As God enables us, we also need, for instance, to support generously organizations or individuals (like missionaries) that are especially involved in helping destitute people. Blomberg points out “that the amounts of money theoretically needed to eradicate world poverty could be amassed simply if all American Christians would tithe.”⁵

While I agree with Blomberg’s proposal to practice graduate tithe in order to lift economic decline, I do not think this generous giving alone is enough to cure economic depression. I am afraid that this proposal will make the poor too dependent on the rich. To avoid this negative tendency, I think Blomberg should have emphasized more the importance of diligent labor among those who are able to work. Wealthy Christians should not only help the needy by giving them fish to eat but also by teaching them how to fish for themselves.

As a pastor-teacher, I wish the author also included Scripture and Subject Indexes for the better use of his book. Nevertheless, I still believe that *Neither Poverty nor Riches* is the best book on the subject. What I particularly like from Blomberg is that he lives what he says in his book. He not only knows the subject by head but by heart as well. How I pray that all Christians will have the opportunity to read this work. With God’s benediction, the book can indeed help us change our economical situation.

⁵ Ibid., 252.