I. FOUNDATIONS FOR MINISTRY TO THE POOR

A. Leviticus sets a good foundation for the biblical command to care for the poor. It shows us God's heart for those with fewer resourches and his desire to lift the needy up out of the societal slums they are living in. Caring for the poor was so important to God that he places laws regarding the poor in his marriage covenant with Israel.

19:10, "Ah you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard, you shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner. I am the Lord your God.

23:22 "And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest, You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord you God."

B. Providing the Poor with the means to care for themselves.

1. The Law gave commands to care for the poor, but God's prescription for this issue was not free handouts, but it was providing the poor with the means to care for themselves.
2. This was so important to God that he set up laws that would make caring for the poor apart of the normal life of his people.
3. The book of Ruth gives an example of this type of care through the life of Boaz who allowed Ruth to gather the gleanings (leftovers) of his harvest.
4. We find here that it is not enough to simply give things to the poor, but it is necessary to give them the means to care for the themselves. Ruth shows us that she still had to work in order to have bread to eat. The actions of Boaz, in accordance to the law, are a perfect example of this reality in action. The fruit of Boaz's righteousness would be the birth of King David and eventually the Messiah.

C. God connects his name with caring for the poor in this way.

1. This scripture also shows us that God connects his name to the caring of the poor. God's reputation is uplifted and his name is exalted through the uplifting of the poor. As we will see in the Psalms, he is the God who lifts up the poor and seats them with princes (Ps. 113). Matthew 5 also shows this same principle when Jesus says that the world will see our good works and glorify our father in heaven. The caring for the poor brings glory to someone and when it is done in the name of Jesus it will bring glory to God.

D. Caring for the poor was apart of Israel's marriage covenant.

1. Leviticus shows us that apart of Israel's marriage covenant to Yahweh was caring for the poor. Their adherence to this command necessitated their faithfulness to the marriage covenant. Obedience was the display of their love to Yahweh, disobedience was a display of their neglect of their marriage covenant.
    a. Deuteronomy 4:23-24 Take care, lest you foreget the covenant of the Lord your God, which he made with you, and make a careved image, the fore of anuthing that the Lord your God has forbidden you. For the Lord your God is a comsuming fire, a jealous God.

II. WHAT IS NEGLECTING THE POOR REALLY SAYING TO GOD

1. The Prophets show us what was going on in God's mind and heart when Israel was unfaithful to God. Isaiah 1 shows God's disgust towards the empty worship of Israel. They worshipped him in their words, but not in their actions for justice. There words were Love for God, but their actions were neglect towards the covenant they had made in the days of the Exodus.

2. The prophet Ezekiel also shows us more of what God feels for the poor when he speaks to Israel about what their neglect of the poor is to God.

16:49,"Behold this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it."

3. The context of this verse is that God is telling a parable about Israel being a bride that has been unfaithful to him. In all of his kindness to her, Israel has prostituted herself to the other nations and instead of being paid by the nations she pays them with the gifts God gave her. She even sacrifices her children to foreign God's

4. He then compares Sodom to Israel and says that Sodom was judged for her, "Pride, excess of food and prosperous ease, but (she) did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did an abomination before me." Israel had an excess of food, but they forgot the poor. Israel's lack of caring for the poor was part of them breaking their marriage covenant with Yahweh. As we saw in Leviticus, apart of Yahweh's marriage agreement was the caring for the poor by providing a means for the poor to gather food.

5. After Ezekiel confronts their marital unfaithfulness to YHWH the prophet connects their unfaithfulness with their disregard for the poor. This shows us a valuable principle regarding the poor, "how we treat the poor is essentially how we are treating God."

Proverbs 19:17 "Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deeds."

6. Our treatment of the poor and needy is deeply connected to our treatment of God.

III. WHAT THE NEW TESTAMENT SAYS

A. In the famous parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus draws this same conclusion regarding the caring for or the neglect of the poor and needy. Jesus tells us that how we treat the poor (in this case the hungry, the thirst, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the prisoner) is how we are treating him. To forget them is to forget him, to remember them is to remember him and the reward (and likewise the punishment) is great.

B. Jesus says that when the nations are gathered before the throne, he will judge them according to how they treated those who were needy. Those who overlooked the needy would go away into everlasting punishment and all those who remembered the needy would inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

C. Just as we saw in the Old Testament we see here that our treatment of the poor is deeply connected with our love for Jesus.

"Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." Matthew 25:41

IV. JOHN

A. John the apostle reveals that obedience to Jesus is how we show love to Jesus and if we love God then we will also love our brother. If we do not love our brother then the word tells us that we actually do not love God.

"We love because he first loved us, If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not see. "And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother." 1st John 4:19-21

"And this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome." 1st John 5:3

B. We learn from John that loving Jesus means obeying his command to love our brothers. If we love Jesus we will likewise love our brothers who are made in the image of God.

1. John also gives us a more practical example of what it means to "love our brothers". He says,

"But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little Children let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth." 1st John 3:17-18

2. We find the same theme we have looked at throughout God's word here again in 1st John. The way we treat those in need is how we are treating God. To love and care for them is to display love for Jesus.

V. CONCLUSION

A. From looking at what the word of God says regarding the poor, it seems clear that how we treat the poor is deeply connected with how we treat God. By loving the poor we are showing our love to Jesus and this means not just give away free handouts, but by actually helping the poor to help themselves. It is this type of love that God desires from his people.