Have you ever asked yourself: “Why does God love the poor?”
And, in that same line: “Does God hate the rich?”

Since we are Christians and live in a culture that has been so steeped in Christian thought, you may not have considered those fundamental questions.

But 2,000 years ago, those were probably reasonable ones. For the Romans, prosperity was a blessing of the Gods. Charity meant giving gifts to the City in the form of statues and monuments.

Today, as our society becomes more secularized and is beginning to abandon a Christian outlook, these questions may become relevant once again.

So how would you go about answering them?

Why does God love the poor?

The key is the Christian understanding of the human person:

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\text{God created mankind in his image and God blessed them.}
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\text{What is man that you are mindful of him, wonders the Psalmist, and a son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him little less than a god, crowned him with glory and honor.}
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Now these texts consider all of mankind -- people in general. Do they really apply to each and every individual? Well the Psalmist also said:

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\text{You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother’s womb.}
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So the Christian understanding is this: we are God’s special creation. He has given us a great dignity: we are made in his image.

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\text{Rich and poor have a common bond, it says in the Book of Proverbs, for the Lord is the maker of them all.}
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Fundamentally, we are all loved by God.

It does not matter if you live in a big house or in a box in an alley. It does not matter if you are kind and charitable or abusive and greedy. Nor does it matter if your IQ is one-hundred and fifty or just fifty. It does not matter if you are a Catholic, or a Hindu, or an atheist. God made you and loves you, and he has given you a fundamental dignity.

Therefore, God does not hate the rich. He loves them as much as the poor, but like a good father, he expects his children to love one another and to care for one another no matter how different they are in temperament and talent.

God believes that we are our brother's keeper. How else could Jesus say:

*Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.*

When the rich man behaves badly, that's when the trouble starts ...

*Will these evildoers never learn?* God says through his prophet. *They devour my people as they devour bread; they would crush the hopes of the poor.*

Yet it isn't punishment that is God's aim, but a change of heart:

*Wash yourselves clean!* says the Lord. *Cease doing evil; learn to do good: redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea, defend the widow.*

Ever since the Fall of Adam and Eve, we have had to labor for the bread we eat. But God never intended that we should hoard for ourselves all the fruits of our labor.

In giving Adam and Eve dominion over creation, God was making them its stewards rather than its owners. That sense of stewardship remained even after the Fall. Just listen to some of the oldest commandments:

*When you reap the harvest and overlook a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. When you knock down the fruit of your olive trees, you shall not go over the branches a second time. Let what remains be for the sojourner, the orphan, and the widow.*
God really does insist that we be generous:

*When you give, give generously and not with a stingy heart. The land will never lack for needy persons; that is why I command you: “Open your hand freely to the poor.”*

Paul and James gave the same message to the first Christians:

*Do honest work with your own hands, so that you may have something to share with one in need.*

*If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and no food for the day, and you say to them, “Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,” but you do not give them the necessities, what good is it?*

When one of your friends, or your siblings, or your children is in a bad way and needs help, you give it. You give it out of love and because it is needed.

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If we are made in God’s image, then we must, at some basic level, be generous and compassionate.

But often our innate talents have to be acknowledged and developed because there are so many forces that contradict them and keep them buried deep within us. I think it’s fear, even more than greed, that really keeps us from being generous.

Learning to be generous is hard work. To overcome your fears, you have to be very intentional, very determined, until at last, generosity becomes a habit.

As you struggle make yourself answer the question: “*Why does God love the poor?*” Flesh out your answer each time you ponder it: dig into scripture, spend time in prayer, and then get up and live it out every day.