



### 3 Nephi 6.<sup>10-12, 14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>... There began to be some disputings among the people; and some were lifted up unto pride and boastings because of their exceedingly great riches, yea, even unto great persecutions; <sup>11</sup>for there were many merchants in the land, and also many lawyers, and many officers. <sup>12</sup>And the people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning; yea, some were ignorant because of their poverty, and others did receive great learning because of their riches....  
<sup>14</sup>And thus there became a great inequality in all the land, insomuch that the church began to be broken up...

There is much to unpack in this passage. We have repeatedly hammered away at several of them in our meditations, homilies, and questionaries. For example, we have spoken often and passionately about economic inequality and its destructive societal consequences. Contrary to modern propaganda, seemingly accepted by nearly all, gross economic inequalities are never good for society. Economic inequalities lead to many other types of unhealthy societal inequalities as this passage describes. God knows this and warns about the evils and dangers of economic inequality. He also provides solutions.

For example, among the many divine solutions to economic inequality and its inherent dangers is one that we have discussed on several occasions: the Levitical stipulation that landowners leave a portion of their harvest unharvested so that the poor can enter their land and gather food for their needs.<sup>1</sup> This economic policy—a policy that would no doubt be criticized today as a breach of property rights and individual liberty—had, not one, but two benefits. First, and most obviously, it met some of the needs of the poor. The second is less obvious but just as important. It reduced the property owner's profits. Thus, this policy of redistribution raised, however little, the economic status of the poor and lowered, however little, that of the wealthy. This economic leveling also served to level social status and influence.

Another example, and one we have recently discussed, is found in DC. 84.<sup>112, 2</sup> Here, Bishop Newel K. Whitney was commanded to "travel round about and among all the churches, searching after the poor to administer to their wants." As we discovered, administering to the deficiencies under which the poor suffer was to be accomplished "by humbling the rich and the proud." This "humbling" could include the beneficial private and internal change in the very inner character of the rich. But just as significantly, it reduced (lowered, humbled) the very real and practical level of economic inequality and the power/influence inequality that economic inequality brings with it.

This lifting of the poor by lowering the rich, we suggested, was not, in the end, intended only for practice among the insular and exclusive group to whom the commandment was given. In keeping this commandment the insular group served as examples to all peoples and nations of the world so that they too would control inequality by lifting the poor and lowering the rich.

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<sup>1</sup> Leviticus 19.<sup>9-10</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, "Dual Purposes: Caring for the Poor and Humbling the Rich."

In this reading from 3 Nephi, we see the economic, societal, and spiritual evils of economic inequality. “Disputings” are an inevitable consequence of economic inequality. Pride and boastings are an inevitable consequence of economic inequality. Persecution is an inevitable consequence of economic inequality. Economic inequality restricts personal advancement as much as if not more than that much ballyhooed and exaggerated lack of personal “ambition” and “drive.” There is no hint of blaming the poor and disadvantaged in this passage, or anywhere else in scripture for that matter. No where does scripture suggest that economic inequality can be eliminated by having the poor work harder or longer or smarter. Rather, the problem of inequality seems to rest with the “merchants,” “lawyers,” and “officers,” i.e., the wealthy and influential. They are the ones lifted up and proud in their own eyes. Economic inequality is a human choice, not an inevitable result of immutable laws of economics.

Society is in need of a great humbling such as that in which the Lord commanded Bishop Whitney to engage. Christianity is also in need of this great humbling. So is today’s LDS Church. Just as we must not think that the commandment given to Newell K. Whitney was only for the Church’s ears and practice, we must not think that economic inequality does not impact Christianity or the LDS church. Here, we come to the insight from my last reading of this 3 Nephi passage: “thus there became a great inequality in all the land, *insomuch that the church began to be broken up.*”

Neither Christianity writ large nor the LDS Church can endure in purity in the face of “great inequality in all the land.” They are liable to “break up” through “great inequality.” To be sure, they cannot endure in purity if economic inequality exists within their own ranks. But neither can they endure in purity when economic inequality exists in the world at large. If they are to endure, they must root out economic inequality in their own midst. But this is not enough. They must proclaim loud and clear against the sort of extreme economic inequality that exists in the world today and that so many justify with all manner of sophistry and blasphemy.

Even if Christianity writ large and the LDS Church can’t be motivated to resist societal economic inequality out of the simple and holy desire to do the right thing, to act as God asks, and to see all God’s children advance as God intends, they should at least be motivated by a sense of self-preservation; for economic inequality is a silent danger that kills and breaks up with stealth.

Some might complain and wonder why I come back to this evil over and over again while seeming to ignore others. The answer is simple: “the love of money is the *root of all evil.*”<sup>3</sup> Many will offer the specious rebuttal, “it is the *love* of money, not money itself that is the root of all evil.” But the fact is, we all love money. Money is the cause of most of the evils that trouble our lives. Nothing explains economic inequality and all the other inequalities that follow in its train than the universal love of money. Evils of all kinds can be diminished by addressing this love of money and the economic inequality that it produces.

Finally, though, we must remember, accept, and act upon the truth that economic inequality is, in itself, sinful.

“It is not given that one man should possess that which is above another, wherefore the world lieth in sin.”<sup>4</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(*edition: December 11, 2024*)

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Timothy 6.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> DC 49.<sup>20</sup>