

ABSTRACT

Evangelicals possess a great concern for helping the poor. This passion has not, however, translated into theological agreement concerning a believer's justice obligations unto the world's poor. At the core of this theological contention is the dissonance, mirrored within the philosophical discourse, over whether justice is ultimately needs based or ownership based. The main objective of this dissertation is to enable this core contention to be made evaluable on the basis of the biblical text. This aim is pursued via the proposal and application of a focused hermeneutical *discrimen* to the NT textual data concerning the moral treatment of the poor. Chapter 1 introduces the breadth of this endeavor. Chapter 2 isolates the core contention and identifies the resolution principle as the proposed means of data integration. This chapter also functions as a prolegomenon to the methodological challenges inherent in this pursuit. Chapter 3 investigates the domain of poverty, as it is delineated by the NT, and introduces several categorization frameworks by which the textual data may be differentiated. Chapter 4 outlines the hamartiological characteristics of the proposed hermeneutical *discrimen*. Chapter 5 applies the hermeneutical methodology to the NT data and evaluates the core contention in addition to offering an outline of the contours of NT obligation unto the poor. Chapter 6 looks ahead to the broader application of this dissertation's hermeneutical methodology. This dissertation concludes that the proposed *discrimen* and resolution principle are valuable for analyzing the NT data concerning the moral treatment of the poor and that justice obligation, as it is delineated in the NT, is predominantly ownership based.

Key words: hermeneutical method, justice, mercy, poverty, biblical ethics