



Regarding the matter of

THE THANKFUL RICH & THE PATIENT POOR

Who's better the former or the latter?

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah

رحمه الله

Regarding the matter of the Thankful Rich and the Patient Poor, who's better the former or the latter?

By Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah, May Allah have mercy on him.

In the name of Allah the Most Merciful, the Especially Merciful. Praise be to Allah the Lord of the worlds, peace and blessings be upon His Prophet Muhammad chosen as mercy to the worlds, and upon his household and companions.

To proceed,

Many scholars and common people have discussed the matter of *"Who's better the Thankful Rich or the Patient Poor?"*

Most of their discussions and disputes are tainted with following their whims, or with a lack of knowledge. The disagreement over this is between the scholars, Fuqaha (jurists), Sufis, the common people, and others. In the great book by Al-Qadi Abu Ya'la titled "Al-Tamam Li Kitab Al-Riwayatayn" are two narrations (i.e. opinions) on the authority of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal that say:

1. The patient and enduring poor is better, and he mentioned that Abu Ishaq bin Shaqla and Al-Qadi Abu Ya'la preferred it, and Al-Qadi Abu Al-Hussain supported it too.
2. The thankful rich is better, this opinion has been chosen by a group that includes Ibn Qutayba.

Most people of knowledge and Fiqh tend to follow and support the "First Opinion" along with people of righteousness from Sufis and the poor; Junaid and others have also narrated this. The "Second Opinion" is preferred by a group of them the likes of Abi Al-Abbas bin 'Ata' and others. Some have said there's an Ijma' (consensus) about this matter, which is false. In this matter, there's a "Third Opinion" which is the true one.

It says that the thankful rich is no better than the patient poor, the same goes for the opposite (i.e. the patient poor is not better than the thankful rich). The best of them is the most righteous among them, as Allah the Almighty said:

إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقْوَىٰ

"The noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you."

[49:13]

and in another verse:

إِنْ يَكُنْ غَنِيًّا أَوْ فَقِيرًا فَاللَّهُ أَوْلَىٰ بِهِمَا

“Be they rich or poor, Allah is best to ensure their interests.”

[4:135]

This opinion was preferred by a group of scholars, the likes of Shaykh Abu Hafs Al-Suhrawardi.

Poverty and wealth are two conditions a slave (of Allah, the Almighty) might find himself in, sometimes by his choice and sometimes without it, in situations like residence (i.e. inhabiting a place without traveling often) or (often) travel, wellness or sickness, ruling or being under a ruler. When considering all these situations, it cannot be said that one is better than the other, as it may be that one is better sometimes and the other is better at other times, and they may be equal at other times, as the Hadith mentioned in «Sharh Al-Sunnah» by Al-Baghawi, on the authority of Anas Ibn Malik that the Prophet ﷺ said: that Allah the Almighty said:

“There are some among My slaves that only wealth makes them righteous, if I made them poor it would corrupt them. There are some among My slaves that only poverty makes them righteous, if I made them rich it would corrupt them. There are some among My slaves that only wellness and health make them righteous, if I made them diseased it would corrupt them. And there are some among My slaves that only sickness makes them righteous, if I made them healthy it would corrupt them. I plan for My slaves, and I am All-Aware, All-Seeing of them.”¹

And in another Hadith that holds the same meaning: “When Allah loves a slave, He prevents him from the Dunya (i.e. protects him from anything that hurts his Deen in this Dunya) just as one of you prevents his sick from water (that might hurt them because of their sickness.)”² This Hadith is also mentioned in Ahmad Ibn Hanbal’s book titled “Az-Zuhd”.

This is regarding the person whose wealth can corrupt (i.e. affect his Deen) and whose poverty can make him righteous as mentioned in a Hadith:

“Blessed is the righteous money (i.e. wealth) for the righteous man!”³

Just like there are 3 opinions on this matter, people can be classified into 3 categories:

1. A rich wealthy person who owns and possesses more than his needs.

¹ From my research, I could not find any narrations of this but some scholars such as Ibn Baz and Alawi Al Saqqaf said it's an Israelite weak Hadith and all narrations of it are weak but its meaning holds true.

² Jami` at-Tirmidhi 2036

³ Al-Adab Al-Mufrad by Bukhari 299, Mishkat al-Masabih by Albani 3756, Grade:Sahih.

2. A poor person who cannot reach and ensure his needs.
3. And a person who owns and possesses as much as his needs.

Among the Prophets صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم and the pious predecessors are those who were rich and wealthy the likes of the Prophets: Ibrahim, Ayub, Dawood, and Sulaiman. And the blessed Sahaba⁴: Uthman bin 'Afan, Abd Al-Rahman bin 'Ouf, Talha bin Ubaidullah, Zubair Ibn Al-Awwam, Sa'ad bin Mu'ad, Asid bin Al-Hadir, As'ad bin Zurara, Abi Ayoub Al-Ansari, 'Ubada bin Al-Samit and others may Allah the Almighty be pleased with them.

And among them also are those who were poor in the likes of the Prophets: the Messiah Isa bin Maryam and Yahya bin Zakaria. And the blessed Sahaba: Ali bin Abi Talib, Abi Dur Al-Ghufari, Mus'ab bin 'Umayr, Salman Al-Farisi, and others may Allah be pleased with them. And some who lived in both wealth and poverty in different periods of their lives the likes of our Prophet Muhammad صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم, and his Sahaba Abu Bakr and Omar bin Al-Khattab may Allah be pleased with them.

The verses of the Qur'an and Hadiths of the Sunnah have judged among people fairly (regarding this matter), Allah the Almighty in the Qur'an did not prefer someone over someone else because of his poverty or his wealth, just as He did not prefer someone because of his health or sickness, or residence (i.e. inhabiting a place without traveling much) or (often) travel, ruling or being under a ruler.

Instead, He says:

إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقْوَاهُ

“The noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you.”

[49:13]

and judged people by their good deeds and what's in their hearts, their Faith and Its pillars, and Its sections certainty and knowledge, love of Allah and relying on and returning to Him, trust in Him and seeking Him, fearing Him, thanking Him and having patience. As Allah, the Almighty said in the Verse of Justice & Fairness:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُونُوا بِالقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلّٰهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَوِ الْوَالِدَيْنِ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ إِن يَكُنْ غَنِيًّا أَوْ فَقِيرًا فَاللّٰهُ أَوْلَىٰ بِهِمَا فَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا الْهَوَىٰ أَنْ تَعْدِلُوا

“O, believers! Stand firm for justice as witnesses for Allah even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or close relatives. Be they rich or poor, Allah is best to ensure their interests. So do not let your desires cause you to deviate from justice.”

[4:135]

⁴ Plural of Sahabi, meaning Companion of Prophet Muhammad صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم.

Because of this the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and his Companions judged fairly among people, be they poor or rich. When a group of wealthy people came to the Prophet and asked him to expel a group of poor believers,⁵ Allah forbade him from that and praised them saying that they seek His face, as He said in the Qur'an:

وَلَا تَطْرُدِ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ بِالْغَدَاةِ وَالْعَشِيِّ يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَهُ مَا عَلَيْكَ مِنْ حِسَابِهِمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ وَمَا مِنْ حِسَابِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَتَطْرُدَهُمْ فَتَكُونَ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ

“And do not send away those who call upon their Lord morning and afternoon, seeking His face [i.e., favor]. Not upon you is anything of their account and not upon them is anything of your account. So were you to send them away, you would [then] be of the wrongdoers.”

[6:52]

And in another verse:

وَأَصْبِرْ نَفْسَكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ

“And keep yourself patient [by being] with those who call upon their Lord”

[18:28]

And when a group of poor people came to the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and asked him about something that would not befit him to do he forbade them from it and said:

“O Abu Dharr, I find that thou are weak and I like for thee what I like for myself. Do not rule over (even) two persons and do not manage the property of an orphan.”⁶

People, be they rich or poor, were equal when sitting with him and attending his blessed speeches, and equal when forming lines to pray behind him and in other instances too. Whoever was known with a certain good trait the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم acknowledged it about them, he صلى الله عليه وسلم was also deeply saddened and hurt by the martyrdom and treacherous murder of the seventy (poor) believers and made Qunut⁷ for them in his prayers,⁸ he صلى الله عليه وسلم also used to sit with Ahl As-Sifa.⁹ On the other hand, we have, Uthman bin 'Afan, Talha, Zubair, Sa'ad bin Mu'ad, Asid bin Al-Hadir, 'Ubad

⁵ This event is explained in detail in Tafsir Al-Tabari and Tafsir Ibn Kathir of verse 6:52, it was a group of wealthy Quraysh polytheists who asked the Prophet to expel and drive away the poor believers, in another weak, arrogant, and pathetic attempt to hurt the Message of Islam.

⁶ Sahih Muslim 1826, Sunan Abi Dawud Al-Sijistani 2868, Grade: Sahih.

⁷ Qunut is the name of a du'a (supplication) offered during prayer at a specific point while standing.

⁸ This is about the Bir Ma'una incident where 70 poor martyrs were treacherously ambushed and murdered by the Kuffar while they were on a trip sent by the Prophet, it is mentioned in multiple Hadiths in Sahih Al-Bukhari: Sahih al-Bukhari 4088, Sahih al-Bukhari 4078 & Sahih al-Bukhari 4095

⁹ Ahl As-Sifa: a group of poor Muslims who emigrated to Medina with the Prophet after they were forcefully expelled from their homes and had their possessions taken away by the Kuffar in Mecca, among this group are the likes of the blessed Sahabi Abu Huraira may Allah be pleased with him.

bin Bashr and others among the chiefs and highly esteemed people of Muhajireen¹⁰ and Ansar¹¹ who had a (high) status (in some cases) that poor Muslims did not have.

This is the fairness and justice that is prescribed in the Qur'an and Sunnah, it is the way of judging that the Sahaba Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz, Layth bin Sa'd, Ibn Mubarak, Anas Ibn Malik, Ahmad bin Hanbal and others may Allah be pleased with all of them, all used in their judgment of matters between people, be they strong or weak, rich or poor.

Among the early great scholars, there's Sufyan al-Thawri, and others who were more leaning towards (i.e. favoring & preferring) the poor sometimes and the rich at other times, using his Ijtihad (i.e. diligence & judgment) seeking to please Allah the Almighty, but he was guided and shown the error in his judgment and repented from it in the last days of his life. And among them are also those who were leaning towards the rich and chiefs the likes of Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri, Raja ibn Haywa, Abi Az-Zinad, Abi Yusuf, and others, each of them had their reasons for doing this and used their own Ta'wil (interpretation) and Ijtihad (diligence & judgment). But the best saying is the fairness and justice that are prescribed and commanded in the Qur'an and Sunnah.

The Sunnah and Hadiths are fair in this matter, it has been narrated:

"A group of poor people from among the Companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said to him: Messenger of Allah, the rich have taken away (all the) reward. They observe prayer as we do; they keep the fasts as we keep, and they give Sadaqa (charity) out of their surplus riches. Upon this, he (the Holy Prophet) said: I can teach you something that if you would do it you would reach the levels of those (whom you talked to me about) and no one else would reach your levels unless they do it too, then he taught them to do Tasbeeh one hundred times after finishing every Prayer, some time passed and they came to him again saying: Our rich brothers have heard what you taught us and started doing it too, he replied: that is Allah's grace, He gives it to whom He wants."¹²

this is an addition to the hadith in Sahih Muslim on the authority of Abi Salih, and here we see the preference of rich people who did the same good deeds as the poor people in their bodily religious acts of worship in heart and body and increased them (i.e. their good deeds) by spending in the way of Allah the Almighty and other monetary acts of worship.

¹⁰ Plural of Muhajir, meaning a Muslim who emigrated with Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina.

¹¹ Plural of Ansari, meaning the people of Medina who welcomed Prophet Muhammad and those who emigrated with him.

¹² Narrated in Sahih Muslim 1006 but not in this exact wording

It is also narrated in another hadith:

*“The poor Muslims are admitted into Paradise before their rich by half a day.
And that is five hundred years.”¹³*

Here we see the preference of the poor believers in that they enter Jannah before the rich believers, and both sayings (i.e. preferences) are Haqq (true) because the poor believer didn't have much money so that he would be judged for (in the Day of Judgment) what he did with it, if he held to it and how he spent it, hence it doesn't delay him from entering Jannah because he doesn't have to be judged for what we mentioned earlier, so he's the first to enter Jannah since he is the neediest of his Creator's reward because of what he missed in Dunya from good things.

But the rich person gets judged for what he did with his money, if he was righteous with it and spent it in the cause of Allah then he's better than the poor person and his degree will be higher, if he was on the same degree of righteousness and good deeds as the poor person then they're equal in degree, but if he was righteous than the poor person then his degree is lower, his need for his Creator's reward is not as much as the poor person's need (because of his wealth and what he lived in the Dunya).

We also have the Hadith of the Prophet ﷺ where he talked about his Lake Fount in Paradise:

“My Lake Fount is (so large that it takes) a month's journey to cross it. Its water is whiter than milk, and its taste is sweeter than honey, the first to drink from it will be the poor Muhajirin, who had bad, torn clothes, unclean and messy hair, who did not marry (the best of) women (because of their monetary situation), and the gates of kings and chiefs were not opened for them, one of them dies and his needs and wishes are still in his heart and he could not meet them.”¹⁴

So they (the poor Muhajirin) are more deserving to be the first to be free from what happened to them in the Dunya from hunger and sickness, and this is a matter of courtesy even in this worldly life when someone is receiving guests it is preferable to present the most hungry guest with food first.

There aren't any more authentic Hadiths about this matter other than these two, and in them is the clear and definite judgment: Poor believers enter Paradise first, but the rich believers have the grace and extra reward (depending on what they did with their wealth.)

¹³ Jami' at-Tirmidhi 2354, Sunan Ibn Majah 4122, Grade: Hasan

¹⁴ Narrated in Sahih al-Bukhari 6579 but without the addition in the second half about the poor Muhajirin.

The narration that says: “*Abd Al-Rahman bin ‘Ouf (a rich sahabi) enters Jannah crawling.*” is a rejected unfounded narration.

It has been proven with the proofs of the Qur’an and Sunnah that some of the best among the Ummah are the (poor) people of (the battle of) Badr and the people of Bay’at Al-Ridwan (The Pledge of Al-Ridwan)¹⁵ and the ten Sahaba promised Jannah and the four Rashidun (i.e. rightfully guided) Caliphs¹⁶ who are the best among the Ummah. It has also been proven in the Sahih books of Hadith that the Prophet ﷺ said:

“I looked at Paradise and saw that the majority of its residents were the poor, and I looked at the (Hell) Fire and saw that the majority of its residents were women.”¹⁷

and it has also been proven in the Sahih books of Hadith that he (the Prophet) said:

“There was a dispute between the Hell and the Paradise and it (the Hell) said: The haughty and the proud would find abode in me. And the Paradise said: The meek and the humble would find their abode in me.”¹⁸

and his saying:

“I stood at the gate of Paradise and saw that the majority of the people who entered it were the poor, while the wealthy were stopped at the gate (for the accounts). But the companions of the Fire were ordered to be taken to the Fire.”¹⁹

This is in addition to his saying in the authentic Hadith:

“A strong believer is better and is more lovable to Allah than a weak believer, and there is good in everyone.”²⁰

In these Hadiths there are two meanings:

1. Jannah (Paradise) is the Home of the most humble and submitting to their Lord, and not a resting place for the haughty and proud, be they rich or poor, this has been proven in an authentic Hadith:

¹⁵ Bay’at Al-Ridwan is the pledge taken by the Prophet ﷺ from his companions under a tree at Hudaibiya in the year 628 to fight the Quraysh polytheists in Mecca in case of necessity.

¹⁶ 22 Abu Bakr (reigned 632–634), Umar (reigned 634–644), Uthman (reigned 644–656), and Ali (reigned 656–661), May Allah be pleased with all of them.

¹⁷ Sahih al-Bukhari 5198, Sahih Muslim 2737a.

¹⁸ Sahih Muslim 2846a

¹⁹ Sahih al-Bukhari 5196

²⁰ Sahih Muslim 2664

“He who has in his heart the weight of a mustard seed of pride shall not enter Paradise. A person (amongst his hearers) said: Verily a person loves that his dress should be fine, and his shoes should be fine. He (the Holy Prophet) remarked: Verily, Allah is Graceful and He loves Grace. Pride is disdainful of the truth (out of self-conceit) and contempt for the people.”²¹

and in another Hadith:

“Three (are the persons) with whom Allah would neither speak nor would He absolve them on the Day of Resurrection. Abu Mu'awiya added: He would not look at them and there is grievous torment for them: the aged adulterer, the liar king, and the proud destitute.”²²

And in another Hadith:

“A man shall remain exalting himself until he is written among the tyrants so that he suffers from their afflictions.”²³ From these Hadiths we can understand that: Among the poor, there can be a vainglorious person, and among the rich, there can be a person who likes his clothes to be fine without being arrogant and proud, Allah is Graceful and He loves Grace, the same is said in the authentic Hadith that says: “Verily Allah does not look to your faces and your wealth but He looks at your heart and your deeds.”²⁴

And in this same meaning, we have to remember the conversation of Hercules with the Sahabi Abi Sufyan:

*“Hercules asked Abi Sufyan,
“Are the people who have accepted his religion poor or rich?”
“They are poor”, replied Abu Sufyan.
“The poor are the majority of the followers of the Prophets, as the rejectors of their Creator’s Message said to Prophet Noah عليه السلام:*

أَتُؤْمِنُ لَكَ وَأَتَّبِعُكَ الْأَرْذَلُونَ

***“Should we believe you while you are followed by the lowest [class of people]?”²⁵
[26:111]***

In this, we can see that the people of rule and high status can be far from submission to Allah the Almighty and obeying him, because their love for rule

²¹ Sahih Muslim 91a

²² Sahih Muslim 107

²³ Jami' at-Tirmidhi 2000, Grade: Da'if (weak).

²⁴ Sahih Muslim 2564c

²⁵ This event is mentioned in its entirety in Sahih al-Bukhari 7.

stops them from it, unlike the humble and submissive (believers). And in this same meaning, another Hadith says:

“I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say in his supplication: ‘O Allah, cause me to live humble and cause me to die humble, and gather me among the humble (on the Day of Resurrection).’”²⁶

Humbleness is the opposite of arrogance, the humble believers are the most submitting to their Lord, humble under His Greatness, they do not seek higher status in this Dunya, be they rich or poor.

And in this same meaning, our Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has been allowed to choose between being a servant Prophet or a king Prophet, He chose to be a servant Prophet because the servant Prophet acts according to His Master’s orders, not out of his fancy and whim, unlike the king who acts according to his fancy and whim (which was sometimes allowed by Allah) like it has been said to Prophet Sulaiman عليه السلام:

هَذَا عَطَاؤُنَا فَامْنُنْ أَوْ أَمْسِكْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ

“Allah said, ‘This is Our gift, so grant or withhold without account.’”
[38:39]

and in Hadiths, we find that he (Prophet Muhammad ﷺ) indeed chose servitude (of His Lord) and humbleness, even when he and who followed him hold the highest statue in the eyes of their Lord:

وَلَا تَهِنُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَنْتُمْ الْأَعْلَوْنَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

“So do not weaken and do not grieve, and you will be superior if you are [true] believers.”
[3:139]

And in another verse:

لِعِزَّةِ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

“All honor belongs to Allah and His Messenger, and the Believers.”
[63:8]

And he (Prophet Muhammad ﷺ) did not seek the highest positions yet he still attained them, and he was blessed along with this blessing that no one else was blessed with, he only preferred wealth so he could spend in righteousness and good deeds, and in the cause of His Lord, and relying on it (i.e. the wealth) to use it to further obey Allah the Almighty and worship Him, because possessing wealth in and of itself is not something can benefit a

²⁶ Sunan Ibn Majah 4126, Grade Da’if (weak).

person, it can (at times) hurt him, he (Prophet Muhammad ﷺ) also was patient through times of hardship and privation that no one else has lived through (with patience), so he attained the highest degrees among those who thank and praise their Lord, and the highest degrees of those who are patient (through hardship and tough times). He lived through both wealth and poverty, and both befitted him at different periods of his blessed life.

2. Righteousness is more (often) found in the poor than the rich, and if it is found in the rich it is more complete and better in the poor, some can have more some can have less because the Fitna (test) of wealth is greater than the Fitna of poverty, hence the number of those who go through it safely is few, and whoever goes through it safely is better (in righteousness) than that who goes safely through the Fitna of poverty only. Because of this, people started seeking righteousness in the poor, because of their high regard for them (because of their righteousness) and that is that and Allah the Almighty knows best.

Because of this reason humbleness became a virtue often attributed to the poor. Because of how much humbleness and righteousness people saw in the poor, they wrongly thought that humbleness goes hand in hand with poverty but this is wrong. Poverty is the lack of wealth, Humbleness is the submissiveness of the heart (to the Creator), this is why the Prophet ﷺ used to seek refuge in Allah the Almighty from the Fitna of poverty and the evil of the Fitna of wealth, as some Sahaba have said:

*"We were tested along with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ by adversity, so we were patient, then we were tested after him with prosperity, but we were not patient."*²⁷

And the Prophet ﷺ said:

*"By Allah, I am not afraid that you will become poor, but I am afraid that worldly wealth will be given to you in abundance as it was given to those (nations) before you, and you will start competing with each other for it."*²⁸

This is why poverty was more often seen in the Muhajireen and wealth was more often seen in the Ansar, and the Muhajirin are better (i.e. have a higher degree) than the Ansar, there were some among the Muhajirin that were rich previously but when they emigrated they left all their possessions and wealth back in Mecca, so they became poor unlike what they were back before. And Allah the Almighty knows best.

²⁷ Jami` at-Tirmidhi 2464.

²⁸ Sahih al-Bukhari 6425.

SOURCE

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Please keep them all in your prayers and may Allah the Almighty place this humble work in their balance of good deeds and may it benefit whoever reads it.

Praise be to Allah the Lord of the worlds, peace and blessings be upon His Prophet Muhammad chosen as mercy to the worlds, and upon his pure household and companions.