

Illegitimate, Ignorant, Ill-treated, and/or Ignored

Admittedly, that's quite a list in our title! I hope what follows lives up to such billing...

"Disadvantaged" is not a new word. It originates from Middle English and Old French with a Latin root. But its adoption into common vernacular seems to be fairly recent, at least to me. I never remember hearing it used until the last couple of decades. As far as I can discern, it is typically used to describe those with familial, financial, educational, social, and even physical or psychological hardships either in their background or current circumstances. Thus those who perhaps through no fault of their own, may be *illegitimate, ignorant, ill-treated, and/or ignored* by society. Certainly, our hearts should be touched by and our actions inclined to help such "disadvantaged" people, cf. Luke 10:30-36,37; Eph.4:28; Jas.1:27. But there is an even bigger and more serious way to be "disadvantaged"....

One can be **spiritually "disadvantaged"** in comparable ways to those who are so in the ways covered previously. Think about it with me for a few moments:

- **Spiritual illegitimacy** occurs when parents (one, two, biological, or adoptive) fail to inform their child about his/her *spiritual* Father – the heavenly One! Having no or at least a present *physical* father is certainly a "disadvantage," but how much more so if a child is deprived of his *spiritual* Father! Every child has a *physical* father whether they know and receive any benefit from him or not. By comparison, every child has a *spiritual* Father who loves, cares for, and provides for him/her, Matt.6:8b,25-33, but unless they are introduced, that child may never *find* let alone come to *know, appreciate, and love* this *heavenly* Father. Without such knowledge and relationship, they grow up thinking they are *spiritually illegitimate* orphans. What a "disadvantage" indeed!
- **Spiritual illiteracy** happens when parents (one, two, biological, or adoptive) fail to teach their children what is "right" and "wrong" as determined by their *spiritual* Father. As important as basic education is in life, how much more so is basic "spiritual" education! Being first fed on the "*pure milk of the word*" (1Pet.2:2) and then further nourished with its "*meat/solid food*" (Heb.5:14) as they grow and mature is the antidote to the "disadvantage" of spiritual ignorance that enables "*their senses (to be) trained to discern good and evil*" (ibid)! Can there be anything more important to eternal health and well being than the "advantage" of *spiritual literacy*?
- **Spiritual ill-treatment** can result either from: a) a *spiritually* illegitimate and ignorant child being treated badly by others because of his "disadvantages," or, b) a *spiritually* illegitimate and ignorant child mistreating others because he/she doesn't know and hasn't been taught any better! Obviously and regardless of the *source* or its *causes*, ANYONE being *spiritually ill-treated* (i.e. *abused*) ought not to be tolerated. Hopefully, two examples will suffice in these regards: 1) the Corinthian church *spiritually ill-treated* their erring brother by *arrogantly* tolerating his sin rather than confronting and exposing it to him, 1Cor.5:1-6 (and he certainly *ill-treating* them with/through his sin!); and, 2) Diotrophes also *spiritually ill-treated* faithful brethren by refusing to "*receive brethren,*" and forbidding "*those who desire to do so*" as well as "*putting them (faithful brethren) out of the church,*" 3John 9-10. The good news is

that such cases of *spiritual ill-treatment* have *spiritual solutions* provided through the inspired Word, cf. 1Cor.5:7-13; 3John10a,11.

- And finally, being ***spiritually ignored*** occurs when those who usually think of themselves as “advantaged” and others as “disadvantaged” (cf. Luke 18:9ff) decide the “disadvantaged” are unworthy of being anything else! Matt.9:10-11; Luke 7:39; John 8:4ff. Obviously, such is contrary to the example of Jesus in Mark 6:34! When He encountered *spiritually* disadvantaged people, He: recognized their condition a “*sheep without a shepherd*,” 2) “*felt compassion for them*,” and as a result, 3) “*taught them many things*.” He didn’t ignore the *spiritually disadvantaged*; He helped them!

If you are “disadvantaged” by *spiritual illegitimacy*, find and get know your “real” spiritual Father, Acts 17:27. If you are spiritually “disadvantaged” by *spiritual illiteracy*, find and learn to read and understand the Bible, Eph.3:3-5. If you are “disadvantaged” by *spiritual ill-treatment*, confront your “abusers” with the Truth of God’s word, and if they refuse to repent, stay away from them, Matt.18:15-17. If you are “disadvantaged” by being *spiritually ignored*, reached out to brethren who understand that Jesus “*desire(s) compassion, and not sacrifice*,” Matt.9:13. But please, more than anything else, understand that a “disadvantage” is just that, a “disadvantage”- not an insurmountable obstacle and not a death or a doomed to destruction sentence. It just means that you need to “work around” your circumstance to accomplish the goal. You can overcome your “disadvantage” IF: you don’t expect or wait for others to do it for you; and you’re unwilling to quit and surrender to it. God and those who are truly His people will help you if you ask and let them. (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org)