

*“Since the poor will never cease to be in the land, I therefore command you,*

*Open your hand to the poor and  
needy neighbor in your land.”* Deut. 15.11

**What does the Bible say about poverty and riches?** Some passages condemn the rich; others treat riches as a reward for the faithful. But one principle is constant:

**For extreme wealth and extreme poverty to exist side-by-side is a sin.** Think about Amos. Think about Lazarus sitting at the gate of the rich man. Consider Deut. 15.7: “If there is among you anyone in need . . . do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted . . .”

**What does this mean for Alabama, the state with the second-greatest gap between rich and poor?** Only New York has a greater income gap between the top fifth and the bottom fifth. What does it say about the value our society places on different kinds of work? And what does it say about our upside-down tax laws?



**Alabama’s state income tax is high for the poor and low for the rich.** At the poverty line, an Alabama family pays the highest income tax in the nation. At the top, a family pays the third-smallest share of income in the nation. Across the line in Georgia or Mississippi, the poor pay less and the rich pay more.

**How did it get this way?** In 1935 Alabama’s income tax was a national model. Its progressive rates were low in the middle (2 percent) and higher at the top (5 percent). Over the next 70 years, we didn’t adjust for inflation. In 1964 the state added a deduction for federal income tax, which sounds good – but it skewed our progressive rate structure. Under Alabama’s income tax, a millionaire pays a smaller share of income than a worker making \$50,000 a year.

**It’s time for a change.** By capping the deduction for federal income tax at \$300,000 a couple, we could afford to lower the grocery tax by 4 percent for everybody. The cost of a year’s groceries would decline by about \$100 for the average person. It won’t mean the end of poverty in the land, but it will make our state a little less tight-fisted toward people in need.

*Learn more at [untaxgroceries.org](http://untaxgroceries.org)*

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