

Biblical Charity (For the poor you have with you always) by Robert Smith, Audubon Press, Laurel, 1997. (10 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

CHAPTER 1. The Character of the Godly: Job

1. Job Reaching Out to Others in Need

Job's life is such an outstanding case study because he, at once, presents for us the proper stance those are to take who are able to aid the needy and he displays for us the proper attitude those are to exhibit who are in need. Job knew both prosperity and poverty. He lived at both ends of the spectrum, moving from abundant wealth and caring for the needy to being needy and seeking after God for deliverance. Paul must have been familiar with the suffering of Job and found the same source of godly patience when he wrote that he was content in whatever state he found himself, "both to abound and to suffer need" (Philippians 4:11-13). There are many valuable lessons to be gleaned from Job's holy life. We are to recognize that our prosperity is not of our own doing, but is a result of God's favor. We must understand that the godly are not exempt from hardship, even poverty, for God may use poverty, especially temporary poverty, as a means of testing and teaching. We learn from this account of Job that godly people are to be characterized by, but not limited to, the pious acts of prayer, worship and "assistance to the needy." Also we see that Job's deliverance from poverty came as a result of his desire to maintain a godly attitude and lifestyle in the face of great temptation. Many today could avoid poverty, or be delivered from it, by emulating Job's godliness and following God's ways instead of cursing God with their lives.

A key feature of Job's life, as distilled from the twenty-ninth chapter of "Job", is that from the office he held as judge he grasped the opportunity to reach out to others with special needs. This is a significant, important trait which God considers of personal merit in Job's favor. Job did have a unique position of authority as a magistrate. We may not all be civil officials but we do all have positions of power and responsibility over which we are able to exercise control. As we go to work each day, as we interact with others in our family, as we serve on church boards, as we go about our daily activities we will be afforded opportunities to assist the needy among us. I firmly believe that one of the reasons Christ reminds us, "For you have the poor with you always" (Matthew 26:11) is to test our character. The poor among us are there to test us, to observe how we as Christians will respond to their needs. Be assured God is watching and a lost world is watching. Job was tested by God long before Satan was allowed to financially and physically ruin him. Job was tested in his everyday life by the poor, the fatherless, and the widow who came before him in need of justice. Is it any wonder that God became Job's helper when Job became needy?

We would do well to copy the lifestyle of compassion and wisdom exhibited by Job if we are to seek God's favor for our own lives and nation. [Pages 7-8]

CHAPTER 2. The Compassion of Scripture

2. Guidelines

Biblical charity is the marriage of God's laws and the compassion of Christ, administered by Christians under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to provide for the needy in our society.

- 1) *Biblical charity is performed in the name of Jesus Christ. (I Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:17)* [A comprehensive explanation of the nature of good works and the meaning of acting "in the name of Christ" is found in the Westminster Confession of Faith (16:2): These good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith (James 2:18, 22): and by them believers manifest their thankfulness (Ps. 116:12,13; I Pet. 2:9), strengthen their assurance (I John 2:3,5; 2 Pet. 1:5-10), edify their brethren (II Cor. 9:2; Matt. 5:16), adorn the profession of the Gospel (Tit. 2:5,9,10,11,12; I Tim. 6:1), stop the mouths of the adversaries (1 Pet. 2:15), and glorify God (I Pet. 2:12; Phil. 1:11; John 15:8), whose workmanship they are, created in Christ Jesus thereunto (Eph. 2:10); that, having their fruit unto holiness, they may have the end eternal life (Eph. 6:22).
- 2) *Biblical charity is founded on the principle of work. (Prov. 12:11, 24; 24:30-34; Ruth 2:5-7; II Thess. 3:10-14)*
- 3) *Biblical charity is discerning. (Prov. 14:31; 19:15; 21:25-26; Isaiah 58:6-7)*
- 4) *Biblical charity emphasizes personal, individual relationships. (Ruth 2:8-14; Luke 10:25-37)*
- 5) *Biblical charity is supportive and implemented on a voluntary basis. (II Cor. 9:7; Gal. 5:14; James 2:6-8)*
- 6) *Biblical charity employs gleaning as a Biblical pattern. (Deut. 24:19-22; Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22)*
- 7) *Biblical charity employs interest-free loans. (Exodus 22:25; Lev. 25:35-37; Deut. 15:7-8) [Pages 9-11]*

3. The three lines of defense against poverty

God, in His wisdom and love, has given instruction through His Word to help us avoid poverty. In fact He has established three lines of defense to guard us against

the trauma of poverty and want. The three lines of defense are: (1) prudent, godly, behavior, (2) the family, and (3) the Church. Personal responsibility on the part of the individual, coupled with the institutions of the family and church should go far in protecting one from destitution. [Page 13-14]

4. Prudent Behavior

The book of Proverbs is a rich source of wisdom which, when heeded, will serve to help keep one out of poverty. The character that God would have us exhibit in our daily lives, that will help insure financial stability, include: (a) being a diligent worker needing a minimum of supervision (Prov. 6:6-11), (b) being the kind of person who does not procrastinate (Prov. 6:6-11), (c) being a person who maintains his possessions (Prov. 24:30-34), (d) being one who lives a disciplined life of self-control (Prov. 23-21, 20:13), (e) being a person who is enthusiastic over his work (Prov. 14:23), (f) being someone who welcomes correction and instruction (Prov. 13:18), (g) being a careful and wise planner before acting (Prov. 21:5), and (h) being a person who has built up a good reputation and is compassionate to others (Prov. 11:24-28). [Page 14]

5. The Church

It is clear from wording found in the New Testament that believers are adopted sons of God (Gal. 4:5-6; Eph. 1:5-6; II Cor. 6:18; John 1:12-13; others). As adopted sons and daughters, we become “brothers and sisters” in Christ. The body of believers must be viewed as a spiritual family. This means that the Christian community should act like a family. Sharing, loving, counseling, sacrificing, and yes, even living together if need be, that is what a truly loving family does. A Christian community modeled on the New Testament pattern is supposed to be a powerful force for good. [Page 15]

6. The Church

In the Roman Empire the early Christians had a habit of retrieving babies from the wild which had been ‘thrown away’ by parents. Husbands who desired sons but fathered girls often discarded the girl babies. Deformed and handicapped babies were also discarded by the pagan Romans and left for the wild animals. It became a common practice for Christians to rescue such unfortunates and raise them in their own homes. As the Church grew and spread around the world great ministries of compassion sprang up. Orphanages, hospitals, and voluntary poverty relief efforts of every kind were established. The Church today needs to continue this legacy. We begin by caring for the needy within the Church, taking the example of the early Christians (See Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-37).

7. A consideration of human nature

Good deeds today, toward the needy, should be tempered with the same understanding of human nature and the sinful state of man.

8. Conclusion and a call to action

The Church and Christians have a mandate from Scripture to care for the needy as evidenced from numerous passages (See Isaiah 58:1-12; Eph. 4:28 for examples); it is not an option. Not only are we to lovingly help the poor, but we are to wisely help them. Each church would do well to train and establish some small group of people within their congregation to receive individuals seeking material assistance from their church. Preferably this would be a group drawn from the deacons or overseen by the deacons (See Acts 6:1-6).

Beyond the establishment of food pantries and clothes closets, there are other opportunities for ministry. To lead productive, prosperous lives, the poor must be educated, freed from the bondage of alcohol, drugs, and immoral sex. They must be assisted in finding employment and obtaining job skills. They must be aided and encouraged in taking responsibility, in making decisions, in being accountable for their actions, and in setting goals. In short, they must be expected to function as mature, ever-growing adults; not treated as little children. The Church must minister to the body and soul of the needy! [Great debt is owed to two excellent books which were of immense value in helping me develop the proper understanding of charity. Dr. George Grant wrote *Bringing In the Sheaves* (1985) to present a biblical model for implementing acts of compassion, and Dr. Marvin Olasky wrote *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (1992) to present a historical model of serving the needy.] [Page 20]

CHAPTER 3. The Character of the Ungodly: Sodom

9. Looking Out for Self

This collection of passages from Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekial give revealing commentary on what actually happened in Sodom which led to its subsequent downfall. It appears to be a progressive series of sin. The people of Sodom lived in a rich, fertile valley and became prosperous. Referring to the Valley of Siddum, Genesis 13:10 reports, “And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar.” The people of Sodom became lazy and arrogant. They were selfish, lovers of self. Each individual, looking out for his own interests, was not above lying and deceit to get what he wanted. The sin progressed until the populace lost any concept of shame or morality. Adultery and, finally, homosexuality became commonplace. [Page 26]

10. Do Not Forget the Needy

We read in 2 Peter 2:6, and “and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who

afterward would love ungodly.” We are told clearly why this story is referred to by other writers in the Bible. We are told clearly why this story is of such grave significance to us. It is an example in history to be taught to all future generations in order to keep them from sin and destruction.

We must guard ourselves that we do not become lazy and selfish to the point of forgetting the needy. We must guard ourselves that we do not become arrogant and prideful to the point that we have no love for the poor. When we become so “holy” that we neglect the destitute (when we feel they are inferior to us and not deserving of our time, love, and effort) we are in grave danger. It is only a short step before we will become so obsessed with our own contentment (peace and security) that we will like and practice dishonesty. Next we will be seekers after *our* own pleasure. We may turn to such sins as adultery and drunkenness. Now we have moved so far from God, we have no standards of conduct. The door is wide open to embrace perversions as homosexuality and abortion.

As Christians we must care for the poor and elderly, sacrificially and sincerely. May God give the people a renewed commitment before destruction does overtake us. Commitment must begin in the Church, with His people, first. [Pages 26-27]