

PURE & UNDEFILED RELIGION: CARING FOR THOSE IN NEED

By David Tucker

There are three things I want you to take away from this message. First, it is imperative that we help the poor, the widow, and the orphan. It isn't just a nice thing to do, one of, hopefully, many good deeds. It is a salvational issue, a foundational part of being a Christian. It is commanded!

Second, giving to or helping the poor is doing it unto Christ, as we will see through the Parable of the Sheep and Goats.

Third, we have spoken before about "helping" others, about setting a good example, and about doing for others. We have looked at it more intuitively. There are a lot of scriptures that provide examples of helping others, but this passage in James is more direct. It says that it should be a primary feature of our religious observance. It should be a primary component of our character. Read James 1:27:

"Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their afflictions, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." (James 1:27, FV)

James tells us to care for the widow and the orphan in their affliction and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. How we treat others who are in need is a reflection of God's love in us.

CARING FOR THOSE IN NEED IS A BIBLICAL COMMAND

We will see through Scripture that the core principle of Christianity is helping the poor. It is commanded:

"You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand. 11 For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.' (Deuteronomy 15:10-11)

We should be happy to give to our neighbor in need, for we are told our works will be blessed. It should be noted that giving is not just of money. We should respond to people's needs with our time, skills, knowledge and resources.

For me and maybe others, I don't think I adequately understood the importance of helping those in need until recently, and there are reasons for that. We often focus on ourselves, our own house, and WE SHOULD, but just because the problem isn't on our doorstep it doesn't mean we don't need to address it.

We are in a country where we are "forced" to be charitable. Forced charity is not biblical charity and it may not be charity at all. God wants a cheerful giver and I've never seen a man happy when he sees 1/4 of his paycheck going to income-taxes and half of that going to what we would describe as charity with some pocket lining

of the bureaucracy and some fraud, waste, and abuse built-in. Now with that said, in an evil society where people would not adequately help the poor it is a necessary evil, when you forfeit that much money and have to pay so much money for essentials you aren't left with much and might consider yourself poor, there is also a bit of resentment.

STORY OF RUTH & BOAZ

The rich man Boaz is the perfect example of a Christ like man. He allows Ruth to glean from some of the better ground rather than gleaning from the edges as is instructed. It is notable that Boaz encouraged her working for her food from a distance, some would call this unfair for her to have to provide for herself and Naomi while the rich man observed. However, God wants us to work as much as we are capable, to try before he provides us with more. (Consider the Parable of the Pound & Talents.) If we won't work for food, will we work as spirit beings in the kingdom? Read the story:

And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Let me now go to the field and glean ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find grace." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter." 3. And she went. And she came and gleaned in the field after the reapers. And she happened to come upon a part of the field of Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech. 4. And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you." And they answered him, "The LORD bless you." 5. And Boaz said to his servant who was set over the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" 6. And the servant who was set over the reapers answered and said, "It is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab. 7. And she said, 'Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.' So she came, and has continued from the morning until now, although she rested a little in the house." 8. And Boaz said to Ruth, "Will you not listen, my daughter? Do not go to glean in another field, neither go away from here, but stay here close by my maidens. 9. Let your eyes be on the field that they reap, and follow after them. Have I not commanded the young men that they shall not touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink of that which the young men have drawn." 10. Then she fell on her face and bowed herself to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found grace in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?" 11. And Boaz answered and said to her, "It has been fully shown to me all that you have done to your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before now. 12. May the LORD repay your work, and may a full reward be given you from the LORD God of Israel, under Whose wings you have come to seek refuge." 13. Then she said, "Let me find favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me; for you have spoken kindly to your handmaid, though I am not like one of your handmaidens." 14. And Boaz said to her at mealtime, "Come here and eat of the bread and dip your bit in the vinegar." And she sat beside the reapers. And he handed her roasted grain, and she ate and was satisfied, and left. 15. And when she had risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not rebuke her. 16. And also let fall some of the bundles on purpose for her, and leave them so that she may glean them, and do not rebuke

her.” 17. And she gleaned in the field until the evening, and beat out what she had gleaned. And it was about an ephah of barley. 18. And she took it up and went into the city. And her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. And she brought it forth, and gave to her what she had left after she was satisfied. 19. And her mother-in-law said to her, “Where have you gleaned today? And where did you work? Blessed is he who took notice of you.” And she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, “The man’s name with whom I worked today is Boaz.” 20. And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “Blessed is he of the LORD, Who has not left off His kindness to the living and to the dead.” And Naomi said to her, “The man is near of kin to us, he is one of our closest kinsmen.” (Ruth 2:2-20, FV)

This story shows us that everyone took responsibility. Ruth did what she was capable of doing, she didn’t just wait for someone to rescue her, she sought out an opportunity and asked if she could glean from the field. At the same time, Boaz did not simply give Ruth a handout. He made it possible for her to work and allowed her to glean from the field, even commanding his men to allow her to freely glean from the field. This story illustrates the principles of: “Those who are able should work” and “Those who are able should help.”

Ruth was a widow who worked hard, found favor and was greatly rewarded for her labor. She worked in the heat and gathered for herself and her mother-in-law as well. This is what God expects of us. He gave Ruth greater measure because she tried. She didn’t sit at home waiting for someone to rescue her and her mother-in-law. She went out and did what she could, and others (like Boaz) were more inclined to help her because of her hard work.

The poor are obligated to try and those with the means are obligated to help those that are in need. This principle means that sometimes we help others by providing an opportunity to do what they are capable of doing.

BIBLICAL GUIDELINES FOR HELPING OTHERS

1 Timothy 5 gives instructions and guidelines to the Ekklesia for providing for a widow. Timothy shows that the responsibility for helping belongs to the family first.

“Honor widows who are really widows. 4 But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God. (1 Timothy 5:3-4)

This clearly shows that family, children and grandchildren are obligated to provide for a widowed mother or father. This is how we obey the 5th commandment--to honor our father and mother. In 1 Timothy we read additional criteria for widows to be eligible for assistance:

“Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. 6 But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. 7 And these things command, that they may be blameless. 8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. 9 Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, 10 well

reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work. 11 But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, 12 having condemnation because they have cast off their first [c]faith. 13 And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. 14 Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. 15 For some have already turned aside after Satan. 16 If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows." (1 Timothy 5:5-16)

What I gather from these Scriptures is that those who are able to work have the responsibility to do so. And those that genuinely cannot provide for themselves, then then those in the Ekklesia, the body of Christ, should help.

SOMETIMES HELPING REQUIRES SACRIFICE

In 1 Kings 17 we read about the story of Elijah and a widow of Zarephath. This is a powerful example of great faith and trust in God. The widow was willing to share all that she had with the prophet of God. We see how one small act of major faith in giving can have enduring positive consequences.

In this story, the widow shares her last bit of food with Elijah, and then God performs a miracle and makes the food she has on hand last through a famine. Later in the story her son dies and she cries out to God and He performs a great miracle and brings her dead son back to life.

We must have faith and sometimes sacrifice in order to help those in need. We can have faith that God will take care of us. Read the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath.

"Arise, go to Zarephath which belongs to Sidon, and live there. Behold, I have commanded a widow to keep you there." 10. Then he arose and went to Zarephath, and came in to the entrance of the city, and, behold, the widow was gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Please, bring me a little water in a vessel so that I may drink." 11. And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Please, bring me a piece of bread in your hand." 12. And she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I do not have a cake, but only a handful of meal in a pitcher and a little oil in a jar. Now see, I am gathering two sticks, so that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, so that we may eat it and die." 13. And Elijah said to her, "Do not fear, go. Do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it, and bring it to me. And then make for you and for your son, 14. For thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'The pitcher of meal shall not be emptied, nor shall the jar of oil fail until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth.,,'" 15. And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah. And she and he and her house ate many days; 16. The pitcher of meal was not consumed, and the jar of oil did not fail, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke by Elijah. 17. And it came to pass that after

these things, the son of the woman, who was the mistress of the house, that he fell sick. And his sickness was so severe that there was no breath left in him.¹⁸ And she said to Elijah, “What do I have to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to call my sin to remembrance and to kill my son?” ¹⁹ And he said to her, “Give me your son.” And he took him out of her bosom and carried him up into a loft, where he stayed, and laid him upon his own bed. ²⁰ And he cried to the LORD, and said, “O LORD my God, have You also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn by slaying her son?” ²¹ And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried to the LORD, and said, “O LORD my God, please let this child’s life come to him again.” ²² And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah, and the life of the child came into him again, and he lived.²³ And Elijah took the child and brought him down out of the room into the house and delivered him to his mother. And Elijah said, “See! Your son lives!” ²⁴ And the woman said to Elijah, “Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth.” (1 Kings 17:10-24, FV)

This story illustrates the importance that God places on how we treat a widow.

“A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, ...” (Psalm 68:5)

SERVING CHRIST WHEN WE HELP OTHERS

Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. ²⁰ Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Philippians 4:18-20)

In this verse Paul is speaking to the church at Philippi. They had shown their generosity on many occasions, both financially and in physical supplies needed for his journey. Paul compares their gifts to a sweet-smelling savor as a burnt offering of the Old Testament. He tells the church that their needs will be provided for. If God would reward gifts to one as capable as Paul what gifts does God hold for those that answer the need of the widow? Maybe it is like giving a bull for a burnt offering of peace and solemnity with our maker. A gift to his people is a sacrifice or offering to Him. Read the Parable of the Sheep and Goats in Matthew 25 and see how Jesus Christ told us we should treat others:

“And because I was afraid, I went and hid your talent in the earth. Now look, you have your own.’ ²⁶ His lord answered and said to him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant! You knew that I reap where I did not sow, and gather what I did not scatter. ²⁷ Because you knew this, you were duty-bound to take my talent to the money exchangers, so that when I came, I could have received my own with interest.²⁸ Therefore, take the talent from him, and give it to the one who has ten talents.²⁹ For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he shall have abundance; on the other hand, as for the one who does not have, even that which he has shall be taken from him. ³⁰ And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness.’ There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ³¹ Now when the Son of man shall come in His

glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory; 32. And He shall gather before Him all the nations; and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33. And He shall set the sheep at His right hand, but the goats at His left. 34. Then shall the King say to those at His right hand, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you took Me in; 36. I was naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' 37. Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and fed You? Or thirsty, and gave You a drink? 38. And when did we see You a stranger, and took You in? Or naked, and clothed You? 39. And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and came to You?' 40. And answering, the King shall say to them, 'Truly I say to you, inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these My brethren, you have done it to Me.' (Matthew 25:34-40, FV)

Jesus Christ goes on to describe what happens when we fail to treat the poor with kindness and mercy:

Then shall He also say to those on the left, 'Depart from Me, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire, which has been prepared for the devil and his angels. 42. For I was hungry, and you did not give Me anything to eat; I was thirsty, and you did not give Me anything to drink; 43. I was a stranger, and you did not take Me in; I was naked, and you did not clothe Me; I was sick, and in prison, and you did not come to visit Me.' 44. Then they also shall answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and we did not minister to You?' (Matthew 25:41-44, FV)

Jesus Christ speaks of food, shelter, clothing, visiting in prison. He doesn't bring up anything beyond that just the essentials for life. We as Christians are obligated to provide the essentials for life to all our brothers and sisters. We need to use wisdom if we are providing more as it can disincentivize work and discourage growth. I also look at this passage and the pride and presumption that is born by those who claim to be poor in this nation. Christ gives us a choice and if we make the right choice He replies:

'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.' (Matthew 25:34, FV)

GOD'S GRACE & MERCY

We read in Psalm 37 that God always provides for His faithful people:

The wicked borrows and does not pay again, but the **righteous is gracious and gives**, 22. For those blessed of Him shall inherit the earth; and those cursed of Him shall be cut off. 23. The steps of a good man are made firm by the LORD, and He delights in his way. 24. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the LORD upholds him with His hand. 25. I have been young, and now I am old; yet I have not seen the

righteous forsaken or his children begging bread. 26. **All the day long he deals graciously and lends, and his children are blessed.** (Psalm 37:21-26, FV)

Jesus Christ showed us an example of helping the poor and helpless in Matthew 9:

“And seeing the multitudes, **He was moved with compassion** for them, because they were wearied and scattered abroad, as sheep who did not have a shepherd. 37. Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is truly great, but the workmen are few; 38. Therefore, beseech the Lord of the harvest, that He may send out workmen into His harvest.” (Matthew 9:36-38, FV)

In Psalm 68 we read that God is the defender or advocate of the widows:

“A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, Is God in His holy habitation. 6 God sets the solitary in families; He brings out those who are bound into prosperity; But the rebellious dwell in a dry land. (Psalm 68:5-6, FV)

In Deuteronomy 10 Moses reminds Israel that God takes no bribes, shows no partiality, and will bring justice for the orphan, widow, and stranger:

“For the LORD your God is God of Gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, the mighty and awesome God Who does not respect persons nor take a bribe. 18. **He executes justice for the fatherless and widow, and loves the stranger in giving him food and clothing.** 19. Therefore, love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. 20. You shall fear the LORD your God. You shall serve Him, and you shall hold fast to Him, and swear by His name. 21. He is your praise, and He is your God, Who has done for you these great and awesome things which your eyes have seen. 22. Your fathers went down into Egypt with seventy persons. And now the LORD your God has made you as the stars of the heavens for multitude.” (Deuteronomy 10:17-22, FV)

In Proverbs 19 we read that helping the poor is like lending to God and that He will reward those who help the poor. In a way we unite ourselves with God when we help the poor.

“He who has pity upon the poor lends to the LORD, and He will reward his good deed to him.” (Proverbs 19:17, FV)

DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEART

Caring for widows and orphans needs to be a priority for the Christian. We live in a world where it is easy to question whether someone really needs help. We can be quick to judge others' circumstances. We can become overwhelmed by seeing suffering all around us. But we can have peace knowing that when we pray and ask God who we can serve and help He will guide us. Helping the poor is doing those things unto Christ and that should motivate us to provide for the needs of the poor.