

## **Some Thoughts On Benevolence** **Lynn Parker**

The church has a responsibility to help the less fortunate, the sick, and the widows, and generally, those who cannot help themselves (Gal. 6:10; James 1:27). As we consider the benevolent aid we might render to those in need, there are several Bible principles and points that we should keep in mind.

**First, the duty to care for one in need falls to the physical family.** "But if any provideth not for his own, and specially his own household, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8). It is true that brethren are all to care for each other. It is also the case that if families do not take care of their various members, soon the evangelistic efforts of the church will suffer. Paul went on to write, "If any woman that believeth hath widows, let her relieve them, and let not the church be burdened; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed" (1 Tim. 5:16). If family is available, they are to care for the needy "and let not the church be burdened." Some families are too lazy to care for their own. In such a case, they have denied the faith of our Lord Jesus and are "worse than an unbeliever." If a family complains that one of their own has been neglected by the church, then certainly the church should inquire as to what the family is doing to care for this needy relative.

**Secondly, some should be appointed to take care of the needy and others need to continue in teaching the word.** Not every member of every congregation should, or needs to, be responsible for the care of the needy. A need arose in the first century church, and with the need, murmuring also arose in the church. Here's the account: *And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. 2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. 3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. 4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word (Acts 6:1-7).*

The facts are clear and there need be no misunderstanding. Note these carefully:

- (1) Widows were being neglected.
- (2) The apostles called the brethren together and instructed that godly, diligent men be selected for appointment to see to the needs of the widows.
- (3) It was not proper that the apostles should forsake the evangelistic duties before them to see to these needs.

Brethren, clearly not every person in the congregation needs to be appointed to take care of benevolent needs. To argue the point is to argue with scripture. Because not every member is caring for the needy does not necessarily mean that the needy are being neglected or the members are unkind. It may simply mean that as far as we know, the needs are being met through the efforts of certain ones in the congregation.

**Thirdly, those in need have duties as well.** The Bible teaches that we sin when we know to do good and fail to do it (James 4:17). Still, I cannot help where I do not know of need. It comes with poor manners on the part of the sick to cry, "I'm being neglected!" when this person has not made known his/her needs to others. Some folks never make plain their needs then complain when folks don't tend to them. Then sometimes, people are just wrapped up in themselves and look for reason to complain.

I have noticed, after more than 30 years of preaching, that many of the ones hollering the loudest are often absent when it comes to care of others. In other words, they want the attention of the brethren but do pitifully little when it comes to helping others. Self-pity is an awful thing, yet it causes some to throw temper-tantrums and cry, "Me, me, me, me!!!"

Those in need can be longsuffering, too. It amazes us to hear that one can become so disgruntled with the brethren over perceived injustices that he/she leaves the congregation in a huff. Why? Because the brethren, in the mind of this disgruntled member, did not do enough to help. In any congregation brethren can falter. Brethren are human, and sometimes mistakes are made. But isn't it unreasonable to say, "I'm leaving because they did not do enough for me" and in so doing display a lack of forbearance, love, and longsuffering? *"Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil" ( 1 Cor. 13:4-5)*. Can we calmly ask the brethren to see to a need that is not being met? It's like the brother who, after the worship assembly ends, makes a quick beeline to his car and then fumes, "No one spoke to me!" He concludes that the congregation is unfriendly when in reality, he is the one with the problem. Such an attitude will never find happiness in the church.

**The needy have a duty to help themselves as much as possible.** The Bible teaches that we are to be productive citizens of the kingdom of Christ.

*For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; 8 Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: 9 Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. 10 For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all,... (2 Thess. 3:7-11).*

The Bible cautions against idleness (1 Thess. 4:11). Surely there are situations where brethren are so ill or destitute that they are limited in what they can do for others, and are themselves in need of care. But when this infirmed brother or sister can, he/she has a duty to be a help to others, and not be a burden. If we are not wise, we can unwittingly encourage slothfulness and laziness. We see a society that is increasingly becoming a "welfare state" with a large contingent of Americans unwilling to work and more than willing to be supported by the work of others. Could some brethren adopt a "welfare" mentality as well? Never let such a sad, tragic state prevail in the church. Some brethren have done more harm than good in rushing to give out money or other aid without knowing all the facts. Christians are to be as productive as they can so that their labor can bless those truly in need (Eph. 4:28; Acts 20:35).

## **Conclusion**

Here we offer these points in a spirit of love for study and consideration. Absolutely we must see to the needs of those in genuine need as we have opportunity and ability. God also expects us to recognize certain principles that govern benevolent aid to those in need.