

Neighbors 04-30-17AM

In Luke 10:25-37 Jesus taught about the nature of the basis of the law. Specifically, when tested, He explained that all law came down to two rules; to love God and to love your neighbor. The lawyer testing him asked Jesus to identify the meaning of neighbor. Jesus responded with a parable that is well known to even the most un-religious of people: the parable of the good Samaritan.

In this parable Jesus made a commandment that becomes part of the law of Christ. This commandment – to do good to those in need – can sometimes be difficult to fulfill. We will see that it is a part of being a Christian to give aid to the poor (first to our brethren, and then to the unbeliever). Indeed, we cannot be Christian without good works to the needy – both believer AND unbeliever. There are several reasons why we struggle to rightly apprehend this commandment.

1. Sometime we misinterpret Jesus' statement that the poor will always be with us to mean that there is no use or purpose in helping the poor. In Mark 14:7 Jesus said that the poor would always be with us. The context is that it was time for the Passover to occur, and for Jesus to be put to death. However, Jesus went on to say that we are obligated and able to help the poor whenever we wish. It was NOT meant to discourage our assistance to the poor. Indeed, Jesus was likely quoting Deuteronomy 15:11, where God commanded Israel to never permit the poor to be without aid from His people. Certainly, we understand this refers to us too.

2. Sometimes we focus more on the church's role in NOT being authorized to help a non-believer than we do in our own obligation. It is accurate that the church is not authorized (neither in commandment nor in example nor can it even be inferred) to provide assistance to those who are not Christians. Yet there are many commandments that confirm that the individual Christian needs to be about this work:

Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers. 3 John 1:5

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. Galatians 6:10

See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. 1 Thessalonians 5:15

Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share. 1 Timothy 6:17-18

Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? James 2:5

3. We do not understand the purpose of the commandment. Sometime people believe that the purpose of the commandment is evangelism (and hence it is sometimes seen as a work of the church). However, there is no sense in which we are to mix these works. We are to do this work for the sake of personal integrity (job 31:16-22) and to receive blessings of God (Proverb 14:21, Psalm 41:1). Jesus tells us that good works are not even to be done so that men can know them (Matthew 6:3-4), meaning that there is no sense where we are to do them to be seen of men. We do this work because God commands it.

4. We sometimes struggle to distinguish when it is a needful poverty and when it is a sinful poverty. The Scriptures reveal that not all poverty is the same, nor is all poverty to receive our assistance. Many times we are told that some types of poverty are the result of sin (Proverb 10:4, 21:17). We are told as part of the law of Christ that we are not to enable those who will not work (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Therefore, we

must deduce that we are to distinguish in our aid between those who are needful and those who are merely taking advantage or living in sin. We are not to enable their sin.

CONCLUSION: Jesus gave as part of His law the commandment for a Christian to be mindful to the poor. This command is qualified by telling us that first our benevolence is to go to our brethren, then it is to the unbeliever. It is also qualified to tell us that we need to be careful not to enable sinful conduct. We do this not to accomplish other works (evangelism, etc.) but to glorify God by our integrity.