

1 Timothy 5:3-16 **A Christian View of Charity**

This morning we need to look at something very practical, especially for our times when the economy is down, unemployment is way up, the housing market is stuck, most people's retirement has taken a massive hit and the viability of programs like Social Security is questioned; in light of all these things, what do we do about people who need help financially just to make it?

Paul addressed that issue with Timothy, specifically regarding what should be done for widows of all ages. We'll see his instruction this morning for the person in need, their family, and the church and we'll look at the role of each. But before we get there, I want us to think about the fact that God has always been interested in our physical, as well as our spiritual needs.

Jesus not only took care of our spiritual needs by dying in our place on the cross, but He also spent the majority of His public ministry taking care of physical needs. Doing things to help and bless and reduce the pain and suffering of this life.

Apart from all the healings, think of things like the miracle of feeding the five thousand (Matt 14:15), one of His most famous miracles. Jesus turned five loaves and two fish into enough to feed the equivalent of a stadium full of people simply because they were hungry and had no place to go buy food. In the long term, that dinner wasn't as important as the truths He had taught, but it sure felt important that evening.

Joseph, Jesus' adopted father, is thought to have died early in Jesus' life because he never appears after the accounts of Jesus as a young boy. As a result, the responsibility of taking care of Mary would have fallen on the eldest son – but Jesus obviously wouldn't be able to fulfill that responsibility, so while He was dying on the cross, He appointed the apostle John to take care of His mom, giving the direction to them both while they watched Him die. It was an amazing display of the attention Jesus gives to each of us individually while also caring for us all corporately – dying to pay for the sins of the world, He also gives attention to the practical needs of one single human being.

After He died, and resurrected, He told His disciples to wait there in Jerusalem for power on high and then to go into all the world sharing the good news of Who He was and what He had done.

They waited for several days and then, on Pentecost – as they were gathered in an upper room praying, the Holy Spirit came upon them all. You can read the story in Acts 2, but it caused a bit of a scene and people wanted to know what was going on – Jerusalem was full of visitors from all over the Mediterranean who had come to worship at the Temple for this important religious holiday. Peter, under the power of the Holy Spirit, began to preach to the crowds about Jesus.

And on that first day three thousand people were saved. The church grew RADICALLY over the coming days and weeks – but many of these new Christians weren't from Jerusalem, they had just come to visit; but they wanted to know more about Jesus, so a way had to be found to provide for them so they could stay and learn.

So, people just started sharing stuff with others who were in need, and when they needed more, some people started selling stuff and giving the money to be used to help the newly formed church.

Not everybody was thrilled about what was going on though – the Jewish religious leaders especially. They were the ones who had put Jesus to death; so all this excitement was bad news to them. They had the apostles and other leaders arrested from time to time and even started putting Christians to death in an effort to regain control. So becoming a Christian wasn't a choice you made to move up in the world socially, it was something you responded to because you believed it was true.

When you took the leap of faith and declared your allegiance to Jesus, you were often saying good-bye to your family, friends, and community. You became an outcast. And that is still true today in many areas where Christians are minorities. In Hindu and Muslim controlled areas, converts to Christianity are ostracized, persecuted, even martyred, to this very day. (It's interesting that the opposite isn't true... I can't tell you the last time a Christian family put someone to death for becoming a Muslim...)

And all of this was happening at a time when there was no social welfare system – no welfare, no food stamps, no Medicaid, no unemployment. If you were poor, or if life took an unfortunate turn, you either turned to family and friends for help, you sold yourself or your children into slavery, or you begged. That was it.

So, the young church started to step in and take care of people, especially widows, who had no place else to go. In 1 Timothy 3 we saw the criteria for those that would serve as deacons, and this is actually where the office of deacons originated.

In Acts 6 we see that a problem had arisen over how to best administer the daily distribution of food to the needy and the solution was to appoint men who were “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” to oversee the daily distribution of food. All of which shows us that “ministry” isn't just teaching a Bible study, it's also taking care of the practical needs of people.

Eventually, the needs were so great that the church in Jerusalem needed some additional help itself and so while Paul was out on his missionary journeys he started taking up a collection to send back to Jerusalem, something he talks about in several of his letters.

So, from the very beginning, starting with Jesus, and really, we could go back into the Old Testament as well but we don't have time this morning, we see that taking care of people's physical needs as well as their spiritual needs has been important to Christians and the church.

Fast forward to 1 Timothy and we see Paul giving instruction to Timothy, the pastor down at the church in Ephesus regarding what that physical help should like, what form it should take, and who had what responsibilities. So we read:

[3](#) 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. [5](#) 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 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.

Now, there's a lot of interesting stuff here, and I'm going to do my best to handle it all for you in the time we have this morning. We'll organize our observations into three categories: instruction for the family, instructions for the church, and instructions for the needy.

First – Instructions for the family of those in need.

- [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.
- [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.
- [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.

Three times the point is made – we have an obligation to take care of our family members. This goes back to the Fifth Commandment – honor your father and mother. There is no statute of limitations on that verse. Time doesn't run out and eventually clear you of that obligation. So, as an interesting note here, taking care of your parents is not just the right thing to do, it can also be an act of worship, it is pleasing to God. And some of you have

done just that, or are doing that – well remember, you aren't just taking care of mom or dad, you're obeying and worshipping God!

Now, as I said, I know some of you are already having to deal with this issue – you've transitioned from being taken care of by your parents, to being a parent yourself, and now you find yourself needing to reach out and take care of those who once took care of you.

But whether you're there yet or you've never even really thought about it, I want to let you know, according to Scripture, taking care of those closest to us *is* our responsibility.

Honestly though... it's not what some of us want to do.

Oh we don't mind helping, we just want it to be "those people over there." We'll go down and volunteer at the shelter, or the crisis center, we'll go on mission trips halfway around the world, we'll spend our time and our money to help others as long as we get to do it on our terms.

You get great stories and pictures from going down to New Orleans to help with relief after a hurricane, it's cool and exciting to help someone else's mom through tough times, but it can feel frustrating, challenging, and crushingly wearisome to help your own.

On top of that, there's another temptation that some of us in this room must deal with. It's the temptation toward pride and superiority.

Some of us feel like we have done better than most of our family in life:

- academically: more degrees or more prestigious degrees
- professionally: better or more prestigious positions
- socially and culturally: you understand things people back in your hometown just wouldn't because they're simple, or hillbillies, or rednecks, or first generation Americans
- financially: you've got the ability to do things, have things, and go places
- spiritually: you've got things together and they're just lost

All of this can lead us to resent our families because we think we've surpassed them. And the insidious, infectious, creeping lie starts to work its way in that you're somehow better than they are, and you begin to look down on them. You elevate yourself to a position above them and distant from them. If you haven't seen it happen in your own life, you probably have had conversations with friends who feel this way.

But what if, what if, the reason you have prospered, the reason you have done so well, was so that you, like Esther in the Bible, could be used to bless your family – *to be the tool through which God provides for the rest?*

What's the point of everything we accomplish or achieve and possess anyway? As Paul is going to point out in the next chapter "we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it" so what are we supposed to do with it while we're here?

The Bible says we are to be stewards – managers of what God gives us, and we should use what He gives us in a way that best represents Him. And if you remember, the nature of God is to show mercy and love to those who need it, even when they don't "deserve" it. And for all of us, we have an obligation to show it to those who are closest to us first.

Now, what about the church's role?

We've seen that the first line of defense is the family – if you are a Christian, the primary responsibility to take care of your family falls on you. But what if you need help, or what if the person in need has no family? Then it is time for the church to get involved. But the church shouldn't just jump in and take on every need. There are criteria to be met.

One of the most surprising things I have discovered about this whole issue is that the church's primary obligation is to those who are saved. Whether it was the church taking care of its members in the early chapters of Acts, or Paul taking up a collection for the church in Jerusalem, or Timothy taking care of widows in Ephesus, the emphasis is always on the church taking care of Christians, not random people who call the office asking for money.

Now, there is definitely a place for mercy and outreach, after all, certainly we don't believe that everyone who ate the loaves and fishes Jesus provided, or everyone who benefitted from a physical healing later turned to Him for salvation, but none-the-less, the overwhelming evidence in Scripture is of the church corporately taking care of its own first, much like the individual's responsibility. So what we see, both for the individual and the church is this responsibility to reach out in an ever-widening circle, starting with those who are closest to you and yet never completely shutting out or losing sight of those who have no Christians in their life.

So Paul gives Timothy some very specific instructions here about who the church should and should not help long term. He mentions an age criteria, but most importantly, they should have a testimony of righteousness, faith, and service.

Which brings us to the third thing we're going to look at this morning – the requirements of the needy. And here there are two major conditions we need to see.

Now, remember, we are talking about Christians who are in need here. So Paul says, the first and foremost thing whether they are young or old, is that they should remember God is their ultimate provider – [5](#) "Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day."

The needy need to remember that their provision ultimately comes from their Heavenly Father, even when it passes through the hands of another human being. As a result, they need to look to Him for relief, not depend on others, because sinful human beings will eventually let us down, only God is perfect.

The second thing we note is that the needy, as long as they are able, should be busy with work and serving others. The older widows who are going to be taken on and given long-term support should have a testimony of a life lived in the service of others. The support the church gives them now will just allow those who are still able, to continue doing what is already in their heart – loving, praying for, and serving others.

The younger widows should not be taken in permanently, but should be encouraged to go out and continue to spend their lives in the service of others – in general they should remarry, and invest themselves in their husbands and their children – giving as well as receiving.

Work is expected not only of those who give, but also of those who receive. In fact Paul also wrote in his letter to the Thessalonians that, “If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.”

Work predates the Fall – it has always been God’s plan for us, and now, in the fallen world we live in, it is the primary way God provides for us and uses us to provide for others. So whether you are the one giving, or the one receiving, no one should be sitting around idle.

And that doesn’t mean you have to have a job, but what are you doing to help others?

So, what do we learn from all of this this morning?

We learn that we all have an obligation to reach out to others, but that obligation radiates outward from our lives – it begins with the people we are closest to. We have the greatest obligation to our children and our parents. Our next level of obligation is to and through the local church. After all, if God is our Father that makes others in the church our spiritual brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers – which is how Paul just told Timothy to treat everybody in vss 1-2. And then, as the need and opportunity arises, we are to reach out to others.

Let me close by reading to you from 1 John:

1 John 3: [16](#) By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. [17](#) But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

John reminds us, that the hard work of getting involved in someone’s life and helping them in their time of need, should be motivated by an understanding of what Jesus has done for us. Remember, it is our privilege to be the glove on His hand as He reaches in to someone else’s life to provide.

And we are motivated in it all by the love that He first showed us.

Take time this today to consider – how does God want to use you to help those who are closest to you? Financially, maybe, but what about just a call to say I love you, or checking in to see how things are going, how you can pray for them?

Mady in Lynchburg there was this interesting trend – a sharp rise in admissions after Christmas because no one knew Mama was in that bad of shape. No one had come to visit in quite a while.

Let's make sure we don't get so caught up with life in the big city that we neglect the people who should have the greatest priority in our life. The people God intentionally connected us to so that we could love, care for and support each other. Let's make ourselves available to be used by Him to bless and serve others – whether we turn out to be the one who needs help or the one who gives it.

Pray – God forgive us for thinking we are better than others!!
Show us where you want us to get involved – show us the lives you want us to touch.