

THE WORK OF BENEVOLENCE

Acts 11:27-30

The book of Acts contains a beautiful account of life in the early church. That church was filled with benevolence. Since the establishment of the church, Christians have been known as people who care about and respond to the needs of others. Helping others is an important feature of Christianity.

God has always wanted his people to be people of compassion. He cares about the material needs of humanity. Psalm 35:10; 40:17. The Law of Moses contained statutes and ordinances for the benefit of the poor and needy. Many of the good deeds Jesus did were prompted by his compassion. The first century continued to help those in need. We have that same responsibility today. We will look at several examples in the book of Acts as well as some other passages.

I. What is Benevolence?

A. Defined.

1. Thayer says it means “good will, kindness.”
2. The only time the word is used in KJV, it is used in a different sense of what we are talking about (I Cor.7: 3).
3. We are talking about an inner desire of good will that result in action.
4. Benevolence simply means caring for widows, orphans, the elderly and those in need.

B. What is our responsibility?

1. Matthew 20:28—Jesus is our example.
2. Luke 10:29-37—Good Samaritan
3. Acts 2:42-47
4. Acts 4:34, 35
5. Acts 11:27-30
6. Galatians 6:10
7. James 1:27; 2:15-16
8. I John 3:17,18
9. These verses all show the responsibility we have to take care of those in need.

C. Acts 2:42-47—closer look

1. They were teaching—continuing in apostles doctrine
2. They were fellowshiping—did eat their meat . . .
3. They were worshiping—praising God
4. They were helping—having favor (grace or charity) to all people.
 - a. Word “favor” translated grace in other places.
 - b. The people are giving “grace” (benevolence) TO the people instead of receiving “favor” FROM the people.
 - c. “Praising God and having charity to (or with) the people.”
5. They were actively engaged in acts of benevolence to those around them.

D. James 1:27—closer look.

1. “To visit” – means “to visit for the purpose of comfort and relief, as in Matt. 25:36,43, and Jam.1: 27” [Bagster]
2. “To look upon or after, to inspect, examine with the eyes, in order to see how he is, that is, to visit, go to see one . . . the poor and afflicted (Jam.1:27), the sick (Matt.25:36,43)” Thayer.
3. The “fatherless” child mentioned here is simply one “bereft” (lexicon’s word) of parents, whether through death, illness, abandonment, or some other terms.
4. Since the lexicons refer to Matt. 25 while commenting on James 1:27, it is appropriate to consider this verse as well.

E. Matthew 25

1. Feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty.

- a. People all over the world who are hungry.
- b. What about the people across the street or in our neighborhood who may be running short of money for groceries and who could use some food?
2. Clothe the naked.
 - a. Great example is Dorcas (Acts 9:36-37)
 - b. Clothes and other personal hygiene items.
 - c. When money is scarce and there are mouths to feed, such things as shampoo, tooth paste, etc. may be simply too expensive.
3. Visit the sick.
 - a. We have already noticed it means more than a drop by for a visit.
 - b. It means taking care of the needs of those who cannot care for themselves.
 - c. Meals prepared, clean the house, baby sit, sit with sick folks, etc.
4. James and Matthew tell us **what is to be done**.
- F. I Timothy 5 tells us **who** is to do it.
 1. 5:3-4... when members of a family are in need of care, other members of the family have the first responsibility to provide.
 2. I Tim. 5:8,9. Some “enrolled as a widow”
 3. I Tim. 5:16—the church . . .
 4. The **church** may care for widows.
 5. We must keep in mind that the church is not a relief agency to be abused or to gratify the lazy, the would-be beggars, or any others that would take advantage of her. (II Thess. 3:10).
 6. The N.T. church did not provide benevolence to just anybody regardless of circumstances.
 7. It is probable that as you show kindness to different types of people, there will be those who will take advantage of you.
 - a. But you should not stop showing kindness for that reason, for we are told that our labor is not in vain in the Lord.
 - b. Err on the side of being too liberal when it comes to benevolence.
- G. With that said, is it possible that our benevolence can become impersonal?
 1. We might become so organized in our benevolent programs that the doing of benevolent work becomes somewhat cold and impersonal.
 2. We have our orphan homes to care for orphan children.
 3. Our homes for the aged to care for the old folks.
 4. If there arises a situation in the local community of a family’s being in need, the church can put the machinery in motion to take care of the need.
 5. We feel good knowing that our weekly contribution helps to make it all possible.
 6. Is there not a danger that we may lose sight of our own personal and individual responsibility to the less fortunate?
 - a. We excuse ourselves from helping because, after all, we are not even on the benevolence committee.
 - b. Maybe that the reason the priest and Levite felt no compassion for the man who had fallen among thieves.
- H. Benevolence involves both attitude and action.
 1. It comes from hearts filled with kindness and goodwill, but it is seen and appreciated in action when something good is done.
 2. It takes more than bringing a can of soup for the pantry to satisfy God’s instructions on benevolence.
 3. It takes more than sending a few dollars a month to a children’s home.
 4. Remember Acts 2:44-45 . . . sold their possession and goods as every man had need.
 5. Acts 4:32-35 . . . unto every man according as he had need.
 6. Acts 11:29-30 . . . every man according to his ability determined to send relief ..

7. I Cor. 13:3– attitude.

I. What can we do?

1. Visit in homes –do what you can to comfort and help people.
2. Visit hospitals.
3. Send cards.
4. Provide meals.
5. “I read about a little girl who came running home from Sunday school wanting a can of food to help fill a basket for needy people. Her mom went into the pantry, scanned over the shelves a bit, then suggested, ‘You can take these cans of sardines that none of us likes.’ The little girl who had been so enthusiastic about this project, suddenly showed obvious disappointment. ‘but that means the poor people are helping us,’ she said.”
 - a. Maybe this story hits home more than a lot of us would like to admit.
 - b. If all we ever give to others is what we don’t want or need, then the little girl was right. The recipients are helping us!
 - c. David said “. . . *nor will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God with that which costs me nothing.*” (II Sam. 24:24).
6. Luke 14:12-13
7. Mark 14:7

J. Benevolence is linked with concepts that are powerful and dynamic.

1. Benevolence is linked with faith, hope and love (Jam. 2:14-18).
2. Benevolence is linked with purity of religion (Jam. 1:27).
3. Benevolence is linked with the judgment day (Matt.25:31-36).
4. Benevolence is linked with Christ (Matt. 25:37-40).

Con: Compassion and a benevolent spirit on the part of God’s people may cause people to see our good works and glory our Father in heaven. If we serve those in need, we will make some mistakes. We will help some who are not worthy of our help. God’s word has instructed us to help those in need. Gal. 2:10 We need to help with the goal of trying to help spiritually.