

The Christian and Charity
The Bible and Culture - NLPC Summer 2018 - Week 7

- Who is responsible to help the poor?
 - One common answer is the government.
 - ▶ Many in our culture believe that.
 - ▶ Some in evangelical/PCA circles do too.
 - ▶ Despite loud voices to the contrary, the Bible does not call governments to directly assist the poor, except by:
 - ❖ Ensuring fair commerce.
 - ❖ Ensuring a fair legal system.
 - ❖ Even then, governments are called to not favor the poor in such matters:

Exodus 23:3 - and do not show favoritism to a poor man in his lawsuit.
 - ▶ It's also important to note that a government doesn't produce anything.
 - ❖ To assist one group of its citizens with minimal resources, it has to take the resources of another group of citizens.
 - ❖ Either at the point of the spear or end of a gun.
 - ❖ Nowhere in scripture is this kind of forced wealth distribution authorized.
 - So if it's not government, should the church, as an institution, be helping the poor in a society?
 - ▶ Many Christians who oppose government charity would say, "yes, it is."
 - ▶ And the idea is certainly preferable to government charity.
 - ▶ But Biblical support for the church, as an institution, helping the general poor is slim to none.

- ▶ In fact, the only clear discussion it is found in 1 Timothy, in Paul's discussion of the regular church assistance of widows.
 - ❖ Note, though, how limited the program is:

1 Timothy 5:9-10 - ⁹ A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man, ¹⁰ having a reputation for good works; and if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, and if she has devoted herself to every good work.
 - ❖ First, we're talking about only Christian widows, and of the most faithful variety.
 - ❖ Second, we're only talking about widows 60 or older.
 - ❖ Nowhere in this passage to find a general obligation for the church, as a local fellowship or denomination, to be aiding the general poor in their region.

- So if it's not the State or the Church, who is called to assist the needy?

- ▶ Believing individuals.

Deuteronomy 15:7-8 - ⁷ If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, ⁸ but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be.

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 - ⁶ Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;

- ▶ God promises to bless believing individuals when they help the poor:

Proverbs 19:17 - One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, And He will repay him for his good deed.

- ▶ Believers are divinely evaluated based on their generosity to the poor:

Matt. 25:34-40 - ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 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 the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' ⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

James 2:14-16 - ¹⁴ What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?

- ❖ Those passages tell us the stakes are high for believing individuals who are called to assist the poor.
 - ❖ But the language of both of them suggests a question...
- Which poor are to be assisted by Christian individuals?
- Everyone? Well...
 - ▶ In the Matt. 25 passage Jesus refers to "least of these, my brothers".
 - ❖ Jesus is not every poor man's brother.
 - ❖ He was speaking specifically of his disciples and, by extension, all Christians.
 - ▶ The James 2 passage said "if a brother or a sister is..."
 - ❖ Not every person is our brother and sister.
 - ❖ Only believers.
 - ▶ In the Old Testament, Jewish individuals were called to assist the poor in their land, but never outside of Israel.

- ❖ Israelite widows and orphans were to be cared for through the charity of Israelite individuals.
- ❖ But not Philistine widows and orphans...
- Is a Christian allowed to assist a poor person who is outside of the church?
 - ▶ Of course!
 - ▶ But our emphasis (and obligation) is to always be on the people of God first.

Galatians 6:10 - So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, but especially to those who are of the household of faith.