**Individual Responsibility & Benevolence**

*by: Harry Osborne*

In Luke 10:25-37, we read the parable of the good Samaritan. It shows how we meet our responsibility to love our neighbor. Of the three men, two failed to properly love their neighbor while one exemplified the love commanded by God. When the priest and the Levite saw a man beaten and lying by the side of the road, they did not have compassion on the man and assist him. Whether they viewed the beaten man as unworthy of their help or refused to make the sacrifice necessary, they passed by on the other side of the road and left the man unaided in his need. The Samaritan, however, was moved by love to help the one in need. Note what Jesus said about that Samaritan's actions towards the man in need:

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, "Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you" (Luke 10:33-35).

The benevolent Samaritan recognized that assisting this man was his individual responsibility and he fulfilled that responsibility. Rather than putting a priority on himself and his own desires, he exemplified the admonition of Jesus that "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Many in our world never realize a need to give to others outside of the holiday season when giving and benevolence are more popular. The sad part is that when the holidays pass, all too many forget about the continuing needs of others and the responsibility of benevolence.

In religious circles, it is a shameful fact that many talk about the virtue of giving more than they practice it. The causes are many, not the least of which is shifting benevolent responsibility in a way that avoids personal accountability. When individual responsibility for benevolence is minimized and the benevolent responsibility of the church is emphasized beyond its lawful bounds, the result is a failure for individuals to meet the benevolent responsibility God has entrusted to them. Though it begins as well-intentioned, churches may be unwittingly counter-productive to meeting benevolent needs by enlarging the responsibility of the church to the elimination of individual duty. Instead of being personally aware of others' needs, the individual feels relieved of that responsibility by giving a contribution into the collection plate. In turn, the church gives a contribution to some benevolent institution, again without a personal connection. With the church taking the place of primary benevolent provider, many needs are left unfulfilled simply because individuals expect that all needs are being met by the church.

Though most of the failure to meet individual responsibility in benevolence may be a case of benign neglect, it can also mask a more willful motive of neglect. Making the church the funnel for all benevolent action serves as a salve to the conscience of those not wanting to be bothered with their personal responsibility in benevolence. While it masks the action in the noble facade of greater concern and compassion, a look behind the false front may manifests a more unseemly reality. Our institutional brethren have often touted their great concern for orphans because of their support of orphan's homes from the church treasury. When faithful brethren have rightly noted such care is a responsibility of the individual Christian, rather than the church (Jas. 1:26-27), liberal brethren have falsely and maliciously charged us with not caring about orphans. In debates, they have been known to put a sack of fertilizer and a baby bottle on the table and say, "These ‘Antis’ would take money out of the church treasury to by this sack of fertilizer for the church lawn, but they will not take a single dollar from that treasury to buy a bottle for a starving orphan." Their charge has an emotional appeal, but it betrays a deeper problem upon closer inspection. Why would any Christian wait to get a check from the treasurer before he bought a bottle for a starving child? Why would he not be moved to care for the infant in his own home rather than shipping the poor child off to institutional care where neglect and abuse are common? It is individuals who are most often the best suited to meet benevolent needs – especially those benevolent needs that God did not authorize the church to meet from its treasury.

The Bible stresses our individual responsibility in benevolence. Let us notice a few passages emphasizing this obligation charged to each child of God:

**Psalm 41:1** - "Blessed is he who considers the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble." God's blessings are not promised to those who are selfish, but to those who give to people in need.

**Proverbs 28:27** - "He who gives to the poor will not lack, but he who hides his eyes will have many curses." If we give to others, it will not deprive us from meeting our needs. If we fail to give to others, our greed will result in our doom. Though it seems paradoxical, we have all seen the truth of this proverb.

**Proverbs 22:9** - "He who has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he gives of his bread to the poor." Let us open our eyes to those in need that we might generously share with them.

**Isaiah 1:17** - "Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow." When the people of Judah failed in their responsibility to those in need, God called it "evil" and demanded that the people change their ways.

**Hebrews 13:16** - "But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." God sees our benevolent actions and is pleased by those who are liberal in such giving.

**James 1:27** - "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." Our claim to being religious is hypocritical if we fail to help others. The same one charged to be pure is charged with benevolent care. Who is that? The individual is charged with responsibility in both cases.

**Deuteronomy 16:17** - "Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you." God never has expected us to give more to others than we can. However, He has always expected us to give what we are able to give.

**1 Timothy 6:17-19** - "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, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

**Ephesians 4:28** - "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need." While theft is an obvious violation of God’s will, the Bible says refusal to work also violates that responsibility by leaving one without the means to meet the needs of others who cannot so work.

Let us remember the responsibility we have towards the needs of others. While we may not see one beaten and left for dead along the side of the road, do we turn a blind eye to those lacking the necessities of life due to famine or natural disasters? Jesus will hold us accountable for the way we have fulfilled our individual obligations (Matt. 25:34-46). In a materialistic society, we need to repeatedly consider this responsibility. When one is constantly searching for how he can get more for self, he fails to understand the blessing found in giving. May God help us to truly love our neighbors and sacrifice ourselves by meeting our individual responsibility in benevolence.