

Prov. 19:17 “Gracious to the Poor”

For the Children: What does it mean to be “needy”? It could refer to someone who has a need for money, since they do not have enough of it. But it could refer to other needs. For example, some people need a friend, or need encouragement. Some may need help with school work or jobs at home. Sometimes we might be tempted to think, “I’m not helping that person! It’s their own fault they’ve got problems.” Or we think, “Someone else can help them.” But the Lord wants His children to have pity on those in need. For He took pity upon us, when we were helpless sinners. He even sent His Son to die for helpless, pitiful sinners. If you think that’s a wonderful gift He’s given for you, then it’s important to share that pity around, and help others in need.

Questions: Why should we be eager to help the needy? Why should that help be given especially to our Christian brothers and sisters? How can you help others in the church, and those outside the church?

Introduction:

First Point: The Call to Be Gracious

- 1) Heart-Felt Pity: The word “gracious” means heart-felt pity for someone in need, who has no claim on us. It can be hard for a successful person to feel pity for someone who has not done well. Yet it is an important attitude for a deacon – and the believer-in-general.
- 2) The Motive for Helping: The reason pity is so important springs from the fact that it is an attribute of God. See Ex. 34:6, Jon. 4:2. We are to reflect God’s character in this. As those who have been delivered because God took pity on us, we should be highly-motivated to show pity to others. This is why we are called to be gracious. We are further motivated by the knowledge that when God’s pity moves us to help the needy, we give a good witness to Him.
- 3) Identifying the Poor: The call to help the poor applies first to helping brethren (Lev. 19:18, Gal. 6:10). However, the Lord extended this to helping anyone in need who crosses our path (our “neighbour”). See Lk. 10:29, 36-37). After all, God’s pity also extends, in a non-saving way, to unbelievers - out of “common grace” (Jon. 4:2).

Second Point: The Loan to the Lord

- 1) The Poor “Represent” the Lord: In Mt. 25, the Lord points out that when we help the needy for His sake, we are “helping” Him. This is even a factor in evaluating our claim to know Him, and therefore a factor in the final judgement. The basis for this is that man is created in God’s image, and therefore we should be willing to help rather than hinder image-bearers. This is doubly so for needy brethren, since they have been re-created in Christ’s likeness. The other reason is that the poor provide us with the opportunity to show whether or not we are grateful for receiving mercy from God. See Mt. 18. This is why a loan to a needy person is a “loan” to God/Christ.
- 2) Loan-Repayment: A loan implies repayment. God graciously describes Himself as being in debt to us, to repay us for lending to Him by lending to the poor. The “repayment” is the inheritance we have in Christ (Mt. 25:34). Of course, God owns everything – He never needs a loan from us. Moreover, every good thing we have is a gift from Him – a gift we don’t deserve! Yet the Lord graciously speaks of a “loan” to Him, and implies a blessed “repayment,” to motivate us further to reflect His character and help the needy. This should further encourage us to support the deacons and to be alert to opportunities to help our brethren and our neighbour.

Conclusion: