

7 Life-giving Virtues: Charity
Deuteronomy 15:7-11
2 Corinthians 9:6-15
WRCoB 6.3.22

A local charitable organization realized
They had never received a donation
From the town's wealthiest businessperson.

And so, they called her for a donation.

*"Our research shows out of a yearly income
Of close to a million dollars
You've not given a penny to charity.*

Wouldn't you like to give back to the community?"

The businessperson mulled this over a bit and replied

*"First, did your research also show
That my mother is dying after a long illness*

And has medical bills several times her annual income?"

Embarrassed, the charity rep mumbled
"Um . . . no."

The businessperson interrupted, *"or that my brother
A disabled veteran is blind
And confined to a wheelchair?"*

The stricken charity representative
Began to stammer out an apology
But was again interrupted.

*"Or that my sister's husband died in a traffic accident"
The businessperson's voice rising in indignation
"Leaving her penniless with three children?!"*

The humiliated rep, completely beaten
Said simply, "*I had no idea . . .*"

*"So, if I don't give them money
Why should I give any to you?"*

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Today we want to talk about the virtue charity.

Charity is the counter virtue to the sin of greed.

If greed is the selfish and excessive desire for more of something (such as money) than is needed.

Then the counter to greed is charity, *the act of giving money, food, or other kinds of help to people who are poor, sick, etc.*

But from a Christian perspective
Charity is so much more than that.

Here's a definition that helps us to understand
The breadth of of the meaning of charity
From the website Britannica.com

St. Paul's classical description of charity is found in the New Testament (1 Cor. 13). In Christian theology and ethics, charity (a translation of the Greek word agape, also meaning "love") is most eloquently shown in the life, teachings, and death of Jesus Christ.

The English word charity
Traces itself back to the Latin word caritas.

When the King James Version came out
The Latin word caritas became the English word charity.

The King James translates the Greek word agape
Using the word charity, as in

1 Corinthians 13:13 KJV And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

The point I want to make, in all of this
Is that if agape means “unconditional love”

And if the KJV uses the English word charity in its place

Then the meaning of charity
Can no longer simply mean
The act of giving alms to the poor.

Charity must include the heart-felt component
Of what Jesus calls neighbor love.

It is not a simple handout to the guy on the corner

It is an act of generosity and compassion

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Charity is a core value of the Bible.

In fact, according to St. Thomas
It is the foundational virtue
On which all the other virtues are built.

The Apostle Paul tells us in Colossians
As Christians we are to clothe ourselves
With certain Christian characteristics:

Compassionate hearts, kindness, humility
Meekness and patience
Bearing with one another
And forgiving each other.

And then Paul concludes in the KJV

Colossians 3:14 KJV And above all these things put on charity [love], which is the bond of perfectness.

We broaden our definition of charity
To incorporate unconditional love.

And so, if greed is the selfish ambition for wealth
At the expense of neighbor

Then charity is the selfless ambition
To give our wealth for the benefit of neighbor.

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I see four reasons why charity is an essential virtue.

1. There is tremendous need in the world
2. The Bible teaches us to love neighbor defining neighbor as anyone in need.
3. Charity counters the sin of greed
4. Charity has personal health benefits.

I quote from Dave Ramsey,
The guru of Christian financial responsibility:

Giving liberates the soul of the giver. You never walk away feeling badly. Whether through a tithe, charitable contributions, or gift to a friend in need, give away at least some of your money. Not only does it generate good, but it generates contentment.

So why does [God] ask us to give 10% to Him? Tithing was created for our benefit. It is to teach us how to keep God first in our lives and how to be unselfish people. Unselfish people make better husbands, wives, friends, relatives, employees and employers.

In a world gripped in fear of a coming recession
Overwhelmed with inflation
And worn out by the needs of so many

Distracted by neurotic self-centeredness
We do well to be reminded of the virtue of charity.

It is Jesus' call on our lives:

Matthew 25:35-36 ESV 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, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you visited me.

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James says faith needs expression in service.

If our faith is not made evident by our works
Then our faith is put into question.

James uses this illustration.

James 2:15-17 NIV Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Our charitable works, our love of neighbor
Is our Christian witness.

I know Brethren aren't very good at evangelism
In the way most people think of evangelism.

We proclaim the gospel with as few words as possible.

Instead, we proclaim the gospel by our action

Christian charity is an expression of faith in Jesus.

They will know we are Christian by our love.

This is the most powerful and influential force we have.

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Francis Bacon once said

If money be not thy servant, it will be thy master. The covetous man cannot properly be said to possess wealth, as that may be said to possess him.

And Martin Luther King

Every [one] must decide whether [they] will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness.

And Winston Churchill

We make a living by what we get. But we make a life by what we give.

And finally, Arch Bishop Desmond Tutu

Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.

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Every Christmas season I make it a point
To watch Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*.

I choose one of several versions of the story.

But my favorite is George C. Scott as Ebenezer Scrooge.

In the scene when he encounters the first ghost
His late partner, Jacob Marley
Scrooge notices he is in chains.

"You are fettered," said Scrooge, trembling. *"Tell me why?"*

"I wear the chain I forged in life," replied the Ghost. *"I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free*

will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to you?" (1.131-132)

*"But you were always a good man of business, Jacob,"
Faltered Scrooge.*

"Business!" cried the Ghost, wringing his hands.

"Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business.

The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!" (1.148-149)

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Acts of charity, in the way we traditionally think of charity
Are short term solutions to immediate needs.

But if we expand the definition to include
The totality of neighbor love

Then charity must include work that seeks to correct
The injustices and iniquities we find in our society.

Social justice becomes a part of charity
Seeking long term solutions
By going to the root of the problem.

Charity and social justice are equal components
Of love of neighbor.

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In Jesus' parable
The despised Samaritan stopped to help a man
Beaten and left to die alongside the road.

He wrapped the wounds as best he could
Carried him to an inn
And paid the innkeeper for safekeeping.

The Good Samaritan responded to the immediate needs
Of the victim.

In his book, *Generous Justice*, Timothy Keller
Askes us to consider a sequel to the parable.

What if the next day the Samaritan comes across
Another man beaten and left to die in the road.

And again, and again
Every time the Samaritan goes out
He witnesses hundreds of victims

That, according to Keller
Becomes a question of social justice.

Why is this problem occurring?
What is it we can do to change it?
What is the root of the problem?

When you meet the immediate needs of people
We can call it a charitable act.

When we seek to change the system
That becomes a social justice issue.

It all falls under what Jesus describes as neighbor love.

**Galatians 5:14 NRSVUE For the whole law is summed up
in a single commandment, "You shall love your
neighbor as yourself."**

Business?

Humankind is our business!

The common welfare is our business

Charity, mercy, forbearance
And benevolence is our business.

That is our business
The business of the church.

And so, may our faith manifest itself in doing good deeds

And may our charitable acts
Not only address immediate needs
But long-term solutions

All for the glory of God and our neighbors' good.