

GOD'S HEART FOR THE POOR

1 TIMOTHY 5:3-16



Should churches and Christians care for the material needs of the poor? Many of us, and I include myself here, have tried but grown frustrated and even given up when we've seen money going to the wrong people, seeing it wasted by people, or seeing people becoming dependent on handouts and not taking any personal responsibility. We therefore end up hurting rather than helping.

So maybe we stop trying to help altogether, but then feel really guilty because we know there are poor people who really need help. How do we navigate this? Should we give to the poor? Which poor do we give to? How do we help without hurting? In 1 Timothy 5:3-16, the Apostle Paul gives us three guidelines for Christian charity

- **THE CHURCH IS TO PROVIDE FOR THE POOR**
- **THE CHURCH IS TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE POOR**
- **THE CHURCH IS TO SHARE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE POOR**

LEARNING

THE CHURCH IS TO PROVIDE FOR THE POOR

Paul encouraged Timothy to provide for the needs of widows. **Honor widows who are truly widows (3)...care for those who are truly widows (16).**

Although this is speaking specifically about widows, the principle behind the teaching on charity can be applied to all situations of poverty: single mothers, the terminally ill, the unemployed, those with disabilities, and so on.

THE POOR IN SPIRIT HAVE A HEART
FOR THE POOR IN POCKET.

“Do we just give out money to every poor person?” No, Paul sets up a screening process.

THE CHURCH IS TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE POOR

Verses 3, 5, and 16 speak of providing for those who are **truly widows**. The church clearly had too many widows on welfare and not enough funds to provide for them all. Paul therefore urged Timothy to sift the applications and exercise discretion so that the truly poor got truly helped.

The first screening question was: **How old is the widow?** Verse 9 prioritizes the over 60's. Why? Partly because under 60, there was a greater possibility of working or re-marrying. Paul does not rule out younger widows getting some help and support but it's not automatic.

The second screening question was: **How godly is the widow?** Aware of the church's limited resources, Paul calls the church to prioritize widows with a godly character and record (5-7, 9-13).

THE GODLY POOR TAKE PRIORITY
OVER THE POOR IN GODLINESS

"Is the church fully responsible for poor Christians?" No, it shares responsibility with others.

THE CHURCH IS TO SHARE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE POOR

First, Paul calls **the widows** to take some responsibility for themselves. Paul critiques irresponsible widows who become idle gossips and pleasure-seekers and in verses 14-15 directs them how to take some responsibility. The church is not responsible for provide for those acting irresponsibly.

Second, Paul calls **the family of the widow** to help in verses 8 and 16. The family is to step up and not leave it all to the church.

WE TAKE RESPONSIBILITY PARTLY
BY CALLING TO RESPONSIBILITY.

LOVING

Let's use this passage to fire up our love for the God of the widows, the God of the poor. We see it throughout the Old Testament, with one whole book, Ruth, devoted to God's care for three widows.

We see God's heart in Jesus who resurrected a widow's son, commended a praying widow, and praised a giving widow. He rebuked devourers of widows' houses and even made arrangements for his widowed mother in his dying hour (John 19:25)

LIVING

Let's reflect God's heart for the poor in providing for them in a wise way that helps them rather than hurts them.
