

## HELP FOR THE NEEDY

During the past few months I have been ministering from Job, and sharing some of the important truths that one is able to learn from this tremendous book. In most instances we usually turn to Job to give us some encouragement when we go through hard times. It also serves as a reminder that we are sometimes exposed to great hardships, as a result of Satan trying to destroy our faith and witness.

I guess if we had to be honest, we would all say that most times when Satan seeks to place us under pressure, and things just do not go right for us, we think it is God who is punishing us. Even our friends look at us and think that we are being afflicted because of some sin in our lives. However, I do not wish to look at this in the first article of the new year for this welfare column. Instead I would like you to look at the following verse, which I have taken from the literal English translation:

**(Job 22:7)** You have not given water to the faint to drink, and you withheld food from the hungry.

This is possibly the worst accusation to lay at the door of the Christian, and in response I would like to give some reasons why we should help the needy.

First of all, this is natural. God has made us mutually dependent on one another. In social order there is an interchange of service, and the general life of the community is simply maintained by people helping one another. The cases of extreme distress are those in which the sharing with each other breaks down, because the hungry and helpless can make no return for what they receive. Still they are part of the body, and if “one member suffer, all the members suffer with it” (1 Cor. 12:26). The solidarity of man is such that the needy are naturally dependent on others for maintenance.

Secondly, this is simple. Only water and bread are referred to. These are the most necessary things; but they are also the most accessible. A poor man who cannot give the smallest coin to a beggar may yet offer a cup of cold water. Of course, true sympathy will lead us to desire to help up to the utmost of our powers. But a very great amount of distress might be alleviated without a proportionate expenditure of money: just think of what R2-00, R1-00, or even 50 cents could do to assist people beyond what we could even start to imagine.

Some people make use of the saying “give a man a fish and you help him today but teach him how to fish and he will be able to help himself”. This may sound good but unfortunately it is not true. Just imagine taking street children off the street and teaching them to bake bread for four months and then sending them out so that you can teach another group. You have not helped them except to educate them in bread baking. I think that we need to add to the saying the thought that once you have taught the person to fish, give him the rod and bait as well as take him to where the fish are. To teach people something and not give them the implements or tools to do the work is as bad as keeping them in the state that you found them.

Thirdly, this is unconditional. At least the one condition is need. We do not have to consider merits when we relieve extreme distress. Water to the thirsty and bread to the starving should be given at the mere sight of extreme need, even though the recipients may in some instances be undeserving. This we admit by our very actions when it comes to emergency disaster relief. As soon as the immediate and pressing needs are supplied, other and more difficult questions must be considered. If we go further we may cause people to be dependent on us as a result of our charity. It is necessary, therefore, to consider character and methods of help suited to lift, not to degrade, the people we want to help. Here very complicated problems usually arise. But the primary help is simple and unconditional.

Fourthly, this is Christ-like. Our lord took pity on the world's need. He did not consider whether He could find any "deserving cases". He offered salvation to the most undeserving. Need, not merit, was the call that brought him from heaven. The most undeserving are really the most needing of help, not with the lavish feeding schemes that will keep them in idleness, but after the first necessities are supplied to maintain life itself, by a kind of assistance that will raise them and better them. How to give this help is the most difficult question to answer. We cannot do better than to follow our lord's example. He raises where He pleases. The grace of Christ never pauperizes the soul.

Finally, the neglect of this is a great sin. Eliphaz was unjust in accusing Job of such a sin. In the eyes of the Oriental, often dependent on casual hospitality for life in the desert itself, to refuse water and bread to the needy was a gross wrong. You may kill your enemy with the sword, but you must not deny him water to drink and bread to eat when he comes to you as a guest. Christianity widens and deepens the obligation. Though in various forms suited to the various circumstances of the world as we find it, brotherly helpfulness is always expected of Christ's people. It is taken as service rendered to Himself. The neglect of it is a reason for rejection at the great judgment (Matt. 25:41-46).