

Let the Church Not Be Burdened

Call the American Cancer Society, let them know you have recently been laid off, your family is about to be evicted, and ask if they will pay your rent/mortgage. How do you think they will respond? Assuming you don't have cancer, the individual on the phone will explain that as much as they are individually moved by your situation, their organization cannot help you. In fact, it would be illegal for them to do so because it not supported by their charter.

The American Cancer Society is not to be burdened with all other kinds of good works or benevolent needs in our society. Why? Because if it gets distracted with all other kinds of work, the work it is charged with will be diminished, potentially even lost. The #1 way to keep the American Cancer Society from doing any good when it comes to improving cancer research, supporting cancer patients, and encouraging cancer survivors is not to try to get them to quit caring about cancer anymore. The #1 way is to get them distracted with other goals and concerns.

With that in mind, read **I Timothy 5:16**: "If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. **Let the church not be burdened**, so that it may care for those who are truly widows" (ESV; emphasis mine, *etc*). This little statement actually speaks volumes about the local congregation. While it deals with one small aspect of financial benevolence, it provides a powerful paradigm and pattern for financial and material benevolence in general.

First, the local church is burdened with a work from which we are not to be distracted. While this passage mentions caring for those who are truly widows, that is not the work of the local church, but is a concession to aid the local church members in accomplishing the main mission. The work is that we bring honor and glory to the "King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God" (**I Timothy 1:17; 6:15-16**). Further, Christ came into the world to save sinners (**I Timothy 1:15**), and as His body, we are to carry out that work.

Second, the benevolence of the congregation has boundaries. Paul had already established the nature of those who are "truly widows." **I Timothy 5:3-5, 9-10** gives insight. What benevolence is authorized is to be for those whose hope is set on God. It is for those who are faithful to the Lord. The local congregation is not to be burdened with general benevolence in the community. Despite modern feelings about the church dictated more by humanistic and postmodern viewpoints than by Scripture, Jesus did not establish the church, either universally or locally, as a benevolence organization for the world.

Third, while congregations must be concerned to pursue the paradigm for benevolent aid established in Scripture, Paul says it is really the individual Christian's job to make sure the local church isn't unnecessarily burdened. How? By individuals dealing with those good works that are not part of the local church's work. You and I are to keep the congregation unburdened by fulfilling what is really our individual burden. For instance, if you have a relative who is a widow, take care of her. Don't burden the local church.

Let's learn a lesson from every other organization in the world. Let the church not be burdened with distracting goals and works no matter how good they seem. Let the church stay focused on its tasks of glorifying God and saving souls.