

'If I Have Not Charity'

Considerate Giving

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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If you would all begin turning to James 1, verse 27, we will begin here with this very well-known scripture. In Ambassador College this was one of our memory scriptures that we got in our first year. We were supposed to commit this to memory.

James 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Now what the Apostle does here is that he presents Christian Living as a two-pronged approach which we can maybe simplify or summarize. The first is doing good works, which is the first part there—visiting orphans and widows in their trouble. And the second prong is to become holy, or as Mr. Armstrong often put it, to build righteous character in ourselves, working with God.

We could also divide it, maybe a little be differently, into the practical and the spiritual.

Obviously when you are doing good works, that is a practical application of what you have learned and put on as spiritual character.

Another way that we can divide it out is to say that he divides it into the outward and the inward. There is something that goes on inside, and then there is something that comes out of you as a result.

However we want to name this two-pronged approach, we must realize that neither one of these groups, or prongs, is sufficient alone. That is why James presents them together. This is pure and undefiled religion to have an outward aspect and an inward aspect or, to have a practical aspect, and a spiritual aspect.

Please turn over a few pages to I John 3 and we will see that John agrees with this, and backs it up. Pure religion requires both of these prongs.

I John 3:16-19 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.

Notice that he said that if we don't manifest God's love by giving, helping, and caring for others

then we haven't fulfilled anything. We can't be sure that the love of God is actually in us if it is not coming out in some sort of physical work that we do, some act of love.

Now I admit, and I'm sure that the other ministers would agree to this, that in this church's teaching, we tend to stress only one of these prongs. It is not that we don't talk about the other, but we tend to stress the inward, the spiritual, the holy, the righteous character part; the second prong that James shows there in 1:27.

There is very good, sound, solid, biblical reasons for this. Basically, it is the more important of the two.

The inward, the spiritual, the holy, the righteous character aspects of it are the foundation—you might call it the wellspring, or the fertile soil—out of which good works grow. You can go as far as to say that effective and truly good works cannot be done without Godly character.

Did you catch that? You must have Godly character before you can even begin to do good works properly! Without Godliness, good works are simply common, and rather empty humanistic philanthropy. We see this all the time in the world.

Some foundation is set up to throw money at a problem. Maybe the person who set up the foundation really wanted to help, but when you get down to brass tacks it is rather a cold approach to the problem. They are just shoveling money at whatever they think is the cause of poverty, disease, or what have you. It is just a big cold corporation, or a trust, or fund, or whatever that is trying to do some good as they see it.

That is the common approach to charity in this world. Let's go to I Corinthians 13 and see a little bit of backup on this. This, of course, is the love chapter. And Paul makes this exact statement in verse 3:

I Corinthians 13:3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

You could be the wealthiest person in the world, and die a poor man because you've given it all away to various charities and needy throughout the land throughout the world, and if there is not that bit of agape love behind it, there is no profit in it. It is like money down a rat-hole.

Some good may come from it, but it is not the lasting eternal truly helpful good that God wants our charity to affect. Many people think that just doing good as we see it is good enough. But that is not the case once you become a true Christian. We're going to see this in this sermon.

In this sermon I want to dwell on the first prong that James mentioned—doing good works. We must not forget as we're going through this that the righteous character of Almighty God in us always expresses itself in practical exercise of good works. It always does. If we have God's holy righteous character in us we will produce good works because God gives. It is His righteous character that comes out in giving. He is the Father of every good and perfect gift. That is what He does. He gives. He can't help but give, because all the little parts of His character manifest themselves in outward concern.

And of course, we know that in the Bible this is summarized by the word love, which is agape, which Mr. Armstrong always told us was out-flowing concern for others.

Further (part of my Specific Purpose Statement, as well) we will see through this sermon that Godly good works contain not just help, but a great deal of thought and concern. It is not just the act of helping somebody else that matters. It also matters how one helps and it matters what one's help produces.

We often come to the conclusion that once we help somebody our part is done. We do this all the time.

Let's say that you get a letter in the mail from some charitable organization, and they want fifteen dollars, and we write a check, and we throw it in the mail, and that's it. We don't give it another thought, until tax time comes around, and we have a receipt there that we use for a tax deduction.

But, God's form of helping goes far beyond anything like that. I hope to show that throughout this sermon.

Let's go back to Luke 3, and begin here with the body of the sermon. We will go to verses 7 and 8, and then skip down to verse 10. This is the ministry of John the Baptist as Luke presents it; one of his sermons that he gave.

Luke 3:7-8, 10-11 Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones...So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?" He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."

And then he goes on and gives advice to various others.

We know that the preaching of John the Baptist was concerned very much with repentance. He told them that they had sins, and that they needed to recognize them, and they needed to turn from them. But, he didn't stop there.

He demanded from them that they bear fruits worthy of repentance as it says there in verse 8. And when they asked him what it is that they should do to show forth these fruits worthy of repentance, he said, "Do good."

If you have a surplus of clothing, he said, give it to someone who doesn't have enough. And if you have more food than you can eat, don't let it go to waste. Give it to someone who can use it.

So, they were to exhibit their changed hearts in good deeds, in giving alms, in doing acts of charity, in giving to others.

We know that this is a common theme throughout the Bible. You can hardly flip to a page

without there being some admonition about doing good, or giving, or helping others; sharing, and many other ways that it is expressed in the Bible.

If you sat down and thought about it right now, you could probably come up with a half dozen scriptures just off the top of your head that talk about our need to give either to the needy, to our brethren, the destitute, or the poor. There are many, many scriptures in the Bible that talk about giving as part of our religion.

Even the two great commandments, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. And the second is like unto it, Love your neighbor as yourself," reflect this teaching as our love for God reveals itself in our love for neighbor.

You can't have the one without the other. If you go through John's first epistle, you will find that he is constantly coming back to that, even to the point of saying that if we say that we love God but we show no love for our brother, then we are lying. We really do not love God if it does not come out in acts of love toward our brother.

James says in chapter 4, verse 17 that if we know to do good, and don't do it, it is sin to us. There are other scriptures, one in Proverbs 3 that says, "Don't withhold...." If you have something that another person needs, and they really need it, if you withhold it, that is bad. Don't withhold it from them.

Let's move forward a few chapters to Luke 6, and we will see that Jesus picks up right where John the Baptist left off. We will start in verse 27. This is part of the Sermon on the Mount, Luke's version:

Luke 6:27-38 But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the *one* cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold *your* tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask *them* back. And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend *to those* from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. [And probably with interest!] But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

Jesus goes further than John. He emphasizes giving not just to those who love us, but also those who hate us, curse us, despise us, and persecute us.

What Jesus is doing there is that He is letting us know that Godly giving contains an element that separates it from the common sorts of charity. And, of course, we know this as agape love—the kind of love that can be done without emotion if need be. It is a kind of love that does for another what is truly best for that person, rather than for what will make that person, necessarily, happy at the time. It is a love that looks beyond present circumstances and looks toward the ultimate realization of the act, toward the effect of your own behavior, primarily.

It is not just a love that out of concern gives to somebody to plug a gap and that only. It is a type of love that is done with a great deal of thought, and that thinks through the effects and consequences of one's actions to their ultimate end. Therefore, the result is that one does good for that person whether that person likes it or not.

Of course, God would want us to do these acts of agape love with a great deal of feeling out of true concern. So, it shouldn't be a cold love. But, if necessary, it can be.

It is a love that one must be very careful with. And, if you read between the lines here, in Luke 6, you can see that Jesus is aiming for the Kingdom of God, not for somebody's temporary help. If we look at it, why would one do good to those that hate him? Why would one do good to someone who curses him or persecutes him unless there was an ultimate end for that other person?

I'm thinking specifically here of a witness that is being made so that in the end that person's witness and act of love of doing good for one's enemies will come to the person's mind in the resurrection (it might take that long), and it will help to convert him. It will make a stunning impact on that person's mind that this was a Christian practicing love and true good works.

He mentions here that in Godly giving there is greater merit when there is no hope of repayment, or even of gratitude, because it is done selflessly. There is nothing coming back to pay, or repay you for your sacrifice or gift. He is very quick to come up and say, "Look, if you do it this way, there are returns! There are rewards!" But, going into it, a Christian must not have those things in mind.

Godly living is done without respect of persons. It is done in mercy and love, and kindness, as He says here in the golden rule, just like we would like to be treated. It is done without condemnation and thus out of a pure heart that truly desires the other's well-being.

Now, we don't want to make the mistake, however, to be fooled into thinking that Godly giving is merely softhearted charity. Obviously, God wants us to have a soft heart. But, we can be softhearted, and be charitable, and be doing it all wrong, because many people have done that just out of concern for a person, giving them whatever, doing whatever it is for them that they do, and making a huge mistake.

In a way, that is what I was getting at in my last sermon. One can be a meddler with the best of intentions. What I'm getting at here as the sermon begins to turn, we're pulling into the idea of the thought, concern, the consideration behind the giving.

Let's go to Matthew 6, back into the version of the Sermon on the Mount that we are most familiar with. He talks about the way that the Pharisees gave, and we can look at this two ways. We can look at this as the Pharisees being hypocritical in that they were merely doing this to try to gain points with God.

But, let's look at this also from the standpoint that they were trying to do this out of a good heart. Not either/or, but some doing it one way, and some doing it the other, because there were Pharisees that were trying to do what was right based on what they knew. So, let's look at it both ways here.

Matthew 6:1 Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them.

I want to mention one thing before we go any further. This word in the New King James Version that is rendered "charitable deeds," and in the Old King James, "alms" would be best translated as "your mercifulness," or "your mercy." There are some who believe the word should actually be "righteousness."

This comes from the Hebrew concept of good deeds, or alms. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word used most often for the idea is "sadaka," translated most often as righteousness. Rather than saying, "doing good deeds," they say, "doing righteousness."

And so the idea here is righteous acts—good works, obviously. I just wanted to help you see that. The Greeks didn't have a word that worked exactly, and so Matthew chose this word which meant "mercies." OK. Let's go on.

Matthew 6:1-4 Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

Now, if you look at it this way like I said before—not just in terms of a Pharisee doing it to get on God's good side, but also that some were doing it from a soft heart, and wanting to. You can see that in both ways this kind of human charity can end in hypocrisy and vanity. It can become a show—theater. Whether one realizes it or not, even if one seems to have a soft heart, doing from the goodness of their heart as they say, it can be a pious act. One that in the end helps little and brings glory and attention to the giver, and not to God, which is the ultimate goal.

If you remember my Glory of God series, that's the object of everything we do—to bring glory to God. So I guess what I'm saying here is that for a Christian soft-heartedness must not be

accompanied by soft-headedness.

We may have the best of intentions—that's fine—but our giving must be directed by the mind of God. To a Christian, it is not enough just to give. A Christian must have an aim and a reason, and a carefully thought out plan for giving.

Maybe I should tone that down a little: A Christian *should* have those things.

Our giving must be thought out, considered, even planned, and precisely executed to bring about the highest good. We will see this in a little bit. It is made very clear in one of the Old Testament verses why we should be doing this.

I want now to show that this is not something coming out of Richard Ritenbaugh's head. Paul mentions it, and then we'll go back and see that David mentions it. And, the thought is certainly there in other places as well.

Titus 3:8 This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.

Now we, not being Greek or having a great deal of education in Greek words and vocabulary, could go right through this and not receive the impression that I think Paul wanted it to make. But, he certainly emphasized it well enough by saying, "This is a faithful saying, and I want you to affirm these things constantly."

And then he hits you with the word, *careful*—"...That those who have believed in God should be *careful* to maintain good works..."

Now this word in the Greek is *frontizoo*. It is only used here in the New Testament (One of those hapaxlegomenons again.). And, this word means "to think," "to be careful," "to be thoughtful," and "to be anxious."

Behind that definition is a strength. It is a very strong verb, the commentators say. It implies not just these things, these definitions, it also implies concentrating upon a project or problem, or a situation. It really means sitting down and thinking deeply about what we're going to do. It implies having our minds constantly occupied with pondering a solution or a way to do a thing.

Paul's use of the word suggests that believers must be constantly thinking about how they can help others. The subject of the verse is good works. That's what we should be constantly thinking about.

Now, obviously, we should be thinking about other things too. The idea here, though, is that we concentrate on ways to help people who are in need. Not just throwing money, not just offering our help one time in a thoughtless, careless way, but if you are going to help somebody, really put your all into it, and do it right.

He is specifically referring to acts of service toward others. Like some of the things that Jesus mentions in the parable of the sheep and the goats—visiting people, feeding them if they're

hungry, caring for them when they're ill, clothing them when they don't have enough, and just doing those thoughtful things.

But, he is also thinking of other things also that aren't mentioned there in the parable in Matthew 25, because it could be anything that could do good for that other person. The specifics aren't as important as the thought, and the care, and the consideration that we put into making sure the person is truly helped. That does not mean just physically. Sometimes, helping others physically is, as we saw last time, being a busybody—meddling. Sometimes it could be getting in the way of something that God is doing.

And so, what Paul is emphasizing here is that we really think through the situation that we've gotten ourselves into. We must be careful and thoughtful, and considerate about 1) How we help others, and 2) What our help ultimately produces.

Now, obviously we are not God. We can't see the future. But, we should have enough knowledge to begin to extrapolate certain things from a situation. And if we don't have that knowledge then certainly as time goes by, we should be adding that knowledge, and learning how to judge situations, and projecting how they could possibly come out. And, what our help, or on the other hand, what our interference might do to the situation.

Now remember when we're in the Kingdom of God we're going to be kings and priests. And our job will be judging others. Paul says, "Don't you know you're going to be judging angels?"

So, our whole Christian life—our whole Christian experience if you will—is teaching us how to fulfill that role. And so we must begin to think, to judge, to consider, to think through, to project, and to extrapolate just like God does so that we can fulfill that role in God's Kingdom.

We have been called to be judges. And if we don't start now, when are we going to learn?

And so it starts with the little bit of power we have in terms of giving. Not just the fact that we can give, but how we give and what our giving is ultimately going to produce. Is it going to help our relationship with that person? Or is it going to hinder it? Is our help going to help, or hinder that person's relationship with God? That should probably be the first question we ask!

Is it actually going to help their situation? We may even want to use the old saying, "if you give a man a fish, he'll eat for a day, but if you teach him how to fish, he will eat for the rest of his life."

There is a big difference in that. You can throw a bag of groceries in front of somebody if you want, and it will help them for a short time. But, if that person doesn't have a job, and you help him look for an opening somewhere, and maybe use a few of your references to pave the way, maybe that would be better. Who knows?

Maybe just giving the bag of groceries is going to make that person sit on his duff all day. You have to know whom it is you are helping. You have to understand that person's character. You have to understand how far that person has come along—how much he knows. You have to understand if he is a go-getter or not.

There are ways to help people without going the old money route. Sometimes giving people money—a handout—is the worst thing you can do. Sometimes it can be actually very helpful.

But, this is where we have to discriminate. We have to be thoughtfully considering our situation, his situation, and most of all, God's situation.

Now a scandal that crops up from time to time in this country and other places in the world is the high percentage of charitable contributions that are wasted in administrative costs.

You might send your \$100 to some charitable organization like the Red Cross, or The American Cancer Society, or the American Lung Association, or some veterans group—you name it—there are thousands out there—and you find out that in some of them only 5% or 10% of a contribution actually gets to the needy. That's pretty poor.

Late in the 19th century philanthropist Andrew Carnegie wrote, "Of every \$1000 dollars spent in so called charity today, it is probably that \$950 is unwisely spent." Five percent, he said, gets to those who are truly needy.

If this were an investment, let's say some sort of mutual fund, would you put your money into it, if you had ninety-five percent expenses, and only five percent gets worked on?

Now, I've looked a little bit into these things, and I know that a rule of thumb in evaluating expense ratios for a mutual fund is that it should be under one percent expenses! Yet, with some "charities" (in quotes because many seem like money-making machines, and not charities) the ratios are upwards to ninety percent expenses!

Now, some may not care what the charity does with the money. They just write a check, and want the tax deduction, and maybe to be recognized as wonderful and benevolent people.

But, is that the kind of giving God wants, where ninety-five percent of our efforts are wasted? I don't think so!

Let's go back to Psalm 41, a Psalm of David, and we'll read the first three verses here. I'm mainly concerned with the first line.

Psalm 41:1-3 Blessed *is* he who considers the poor; The LORD will deliver him in time of trouble. The LORD will preserve him and keep him alive, *And* he will be blessed on the earth; You will not deliver him to the will of his enemies. The LORD will strengthen him on his bed of illness; You will sustain him on his sickbed.

So, here are some very wonderful promises for those who consider the poor.

Now once again, just like in the last verse, (Titus 3:8 above), we could skip over this word, and just go blithely on, but this is a very interesting Hebrew word translated "considers." It is the Hebrew word *sakal*.

Now this is very interesting. This is the definition from a book I have, and failed to write down. It is similar to Vine's except it is for the Old Testament. The definition from this book for the word *sakal* is "to look at; to look at with the mind; to consider; to attend to."

You see what it has done here? Being a very picturesque language, the Hebrew in this word has

run the gamut on this word's definition. It starts with looking at something, and goes all the way through to attending to it.

So, it is something that, if you understand what I'm getting at here, shows a process.

OK. The definition goes on. This is what it implies: "*To be or become intelligent, prudent, or wise. It implies maturity of understanding, or judgment.*" Now let's put these back in here.

"Blessed is he who intelligently, prudently, or wisely having maturity of understanding and judgment considers the poor.

The *Theological Word Book of the Old Testament* on page 877 says this, "*Sakal* is 'The process of thinking through a complex arrangement of thought resulting in a wise dealing, and use of good, practical common sense. Another end result is the emphasis upon being successful.'"

Now, what did David say, then? By using this word, he did not say, "Blessed is he who sees people in need." We could take it that way. That is one definition, to look at. But, by using *sakal* he implies a great deal more.

He says, "Blessed is the person who sees a need, and then looking at the complex situation that surrounds this need thinks through how he could best, most intelligently, and wisely bring about a successful solution to this need."

That is what this word *sakal* means. It is not just seeing something, and then saying, "Oh yeah! Here's this."

It is seeing the situation—a person in need—and sitting down, taking stock, and seeing what you have to give—seeing what the other person really needs—seeing the other person's situation—seeing God's involvement—seeing just how far that person has come along. And then extrapolating what one's actions and various methods that one may take would produce in the end, choosing the very best solution, and then going out and bringing it to a very successful conclusion.

That is a lot! There is a great deal involved in doing good when you are a Christian!

I think that most of us who have come out of Protestantism, or just having been in the culture, think that there are quick, simple, and instant solutions to things! That, all you got to do is give. Do whatever comes to mind. Use whatever is at hand. That is the way that the Protestant religion is set up. Because God has already done everything and we don't have to do very much. We don't have to get up off our rear end and help very much because we're already saved!

And so there is no reason to actually sit down and think about how we can truly help a situation that is running into problems.

Let's go to a few other verses that use this word, *sakal*, just to see how it is used elsewhere. Let's go to Job 34. This is actually Elihu contradicting Job about certain things.

Job 34:27 Because they turned back from Him, And would not consider any of His ways,

Now he is talking about wicked men here.

Job 34:27-28 Because they turned back from Him, And would not consider [that's the word right there] any of His ways, So that they caused the cry of the poor to come to Him; For He hears the cry of the afflicted.

Now what is he saying here?

Wicked men do not consider how to help the poor. They do not *sakal*, and thus the poor are oppressed. God takes the side of the poor and the needy, and guess what happens then? He acts! He acts against the wicked. OK. Let's go to Psalm 64 and see another instance.

Psalm 64:9 All men shall fear, And shall declare the work of God; For they shall wisely consider His doing.

Notice here that *sakal* is linked with fearing God. The implication is that if one does not fear God, he is probably not considering God's ways—what God is doing—and you will end up on the wrong side of Him. Again, it is very similar to what was said in Job 34, just put more positively.

When we wisely consider what God is doing then we begin to fear God. When we think through all the things that God is doing we come to a right appreciation of what is going on.

Let's go to Proverbs 21:12. The New King James probably does not translate this properly. It puts the word "God" here in italics. It probably should not be there. I will leave it out.

Proverbs 21:12 The righteous [*God*] wisely considers [*sakal*] the house of the wicked, Overthrowing the wicked for *their* wickedness.

So we not only need to consider the poor, not only need to consider what God is doing, but we need to consider those who are doing evil in society. Here it shown during a time when the righteous had power to overthrow the wicked. He uses this process of *sakal* to come to a righteous judgment about evil doers.

Now the New King James could have been right up there saying, "The righteous *God* wisely considers the house of the wicked, overthrowing the wicked for their wickedness."

But, most scholars don't think that it is speaking about God there, but righteous people.

Daniel 7:8 I was considering the horns...

Daniel was sitting there after seeing this vision, and what was he doing? He was thinking deeply about the significance of these horns. He was running this through his mind and trying to fit it in with the scenarios that he knew from prophecy. He was considering how all this fit it, and how it was going to work out.

You see, *sakal* is a thought-process. Thinking things all the way through to their successful conclusion. In other words, we can say here (going back to Psalm 41:1) that God blesses the Christian who thinks deeply about how he can help the needy, who makes a mature judgment, and then who attends to that need. His giving is done in wisdom and thoughtful concern.

Let's go back to Proverbs 29:7. This is interesting:

Proverbs 29:7 The righteous considers the cause of the poor, [very similar to Psalm 41:1] *But* the wicked does not understand *such* knowledge.

The righteous person not only sees the need, but he also thinks about it, as we've seen, and works to solve the difficulty. We've seen that. But, notice the contrast here. A wicked person, lacking that missing dimension of God's love, cannot even comprehend the process. That seems a fair paraphrase. A wicked person cannot even comprehend the process. He doesn't know why it is necessary. He can't figure it out why it even matters.

He doesn't have the equipment—the missing dimension of God's love—to see that there is any difference between thinking about it, or not. It comes down to being as simple as that.

He thinks that it is good enough to just throw money at something, or do a little short gap thing. But, the righteous considers the cause of the poor. He thinks it all the way through.

The dividing point here in this particular verse between the righteous and the wicked is the thought process—what goes on inside our heads.

OK. We come down to that verse where I said we will really see the difference. Jeremiah 22:15-16. These verses were written to the sons of Josiah: Amaziah, Jehoiakim and the one who became Zedekiah whose real name was Eliakim or something like that. These were the three sons of Josiah.

Now this is very significant. Josiah was arguably Judah's most righteous king. He was at least on par with David. There is not a bad thing said about Josiah except the very last act of his life, which, by the way, I should have used in my last sermon as an example of meddling. I did not. I should have. It was a very poignant illustration of meddling. I will tell you what it was.

There was a great power struggle going on in the Middle East. There was the Babylonian Empire to the northeast in Mesopotamia that was gathering strength. To the southwest was the age old Empire of Egypt, which was also very strong. And, guess who was in the middle? Judah.

Now, at this point, Josiah decided to ally himself with Babylon. There were certain advantages to it to the nation of Judah. He correctly saw that Babylon was the one that was coming, while Egypt was fading.

However, timing is always the most important part of these kinds of situations. Well, Pharaoh Necho decided that he was going to take on the Babylonian Empire. And so he and multitudes of chariots and soldiers started marching north out of Egypt through Judah.

And Josiah, as a vassal of the Babylonian King decided he was going to go and give his support

to the Babylonians. And so they met at Carchemish for a very famous battle. Well, while this was starting to happen, Pharaoh Necho sent a courier to Josiah and said, "Josiah. Stay out of this. It does not involve you. God wants you to stay home."

It is very clear in there. This is something that God has instructed him to do. This was the Egyptian King saying that God had told him (Josiah) not to get involved. Well, Josiah decides to ignore this. He goes up into battle in disguise, and gets killed. He was meddling in a matter that was none of his business. He died because of it. And Judah went down very quickly.

It had long term ramifications for the nation of Judah. Judah was doing OK under a righteous king, but Josiah's sons then took over. Now we will read this. This is God's personal advice to the sons of Josiah:

Jeremiah 22:15 Shall you reign because you enclose *yourself* in cedar?

"Just because you have the trappings of royalty, you have all this money, power and prestige, because you are the sons of David, the literal sons of Josiah, is this the reason you are reigning?"

God is saying, "Your right to reign does not rely on your wealth or position." We know it relied on God Himself. OK. God probably infuriates them with what He does here.

Jeremiah 22:15 ...Did not your father eat and drink, And do justice and righteousness?

That may sound odd to you, but what He is getting at is through a word picture that just like Josiah ate and drank, it was a normal part of his life to do justice and righteousness. To him it was like eating and drinking.

That is the way it is supposed to be for us! It should be as natural as eating and drinking to do righteousness and justice! And, if you go back and read the story of Josiah, he was a very young child when he came to the throne. By the time he was sixteen he had begun to purge Judah of all idolatry. And, did just a splendid job of putting Judah back on track for as much as he could do.

And so it says here that for Josiah doing righteousness and justice was like eating and drinking. And then God says:

Jeremiah 22:15 ...Then *it was* well with him.

That is the way that it is. That is how you get blessed. Verse 16:

Jeremiah 22:16 He judged the cause of the poor and needy; Then *it was* well. *Was* not this knowing Me?" says the LORD.

That's it!

Now I don't want you to think that it is just that he judged the cause of the poor and the needy—*that* was knowing Him, but it was certainly involved.

It is this idea that he did justice and righteousness so naturally as part of his everyday doing of things, it came out in judging the cause of the poor and needy. As a result of this, he came to know God.

That was the ultimate result of going through this process of thinking through what he was doing; thinking about how it would work out; thinking about the various ways that he might work through the situation; and then carrying it through to its end.

Why is this?

Because, that is what God does! It works because God does this all the time! He is constantly thinking, and working, and projecting how things will work out if He does this or that. If both of these choices are seemingly equally good, which one will work the best to bring about His ultimate aim?

That is what God does all the time. And, when we begin to do as He does, we come to know Him. It starts forming the mind of God in us. We start judging situations—people's actions, everything—like He does.

And once we get to start doing what He does, our relationship grows because we're like each other. And we enjoy each other's company because we see one another in each other.

I don't know if you have ever read some statistics about why men and women get married, and how they choose their mates, but it is becoming clearer that both men and women choose their mates because they are most like them of all the people they've met.

It is not just because someone is pretty, or you like their perfume, or they perform a task very well, or whatever. We are attracted to people who are like us. And the same happens spiritually.

We get along best, and are in unity best with those who are most like us. We want that to be especially the case with God. The only way that is going to happen is when we change to be like Him.

This begins to happen when we start thinking using this *saka* process, where we look at things, and think about them, using our intelligence and wisdom, and prudence. We then come up with a solution, and we carry it through.

That's what God does. That's what we're supposed to learn.

Now we know that God doesn't give and help indiscriminately. We know this from our own experience. How many times have we asked God for something? We really "need" it, but He doesn't give it to us.

He judged our cause, and determined that another way—other gifts—waiting a long time—putting you through some other process—giving you another trial—was better for us than what we really "needed" (or so we thought).

That is the same process that we have to go through in determining the best way to help those we see in need. We've got to put on our thinking caps, and start thinking like God.

You might want to write down Proverbs 31, verses 8 and 9.

Proverbs 31:8-9 Open your mouth for the speechless, In the cause of all *who are* appointed to die. Open your mouth, judge righteously, And plead the cause of the poor and needy.

God says here, basically, go to bat for the disadvantaged. But, He admonishes us to judge righteously.

Now we know that there are people in the world who maybe because they have too much time, or money, or whatever on their hands, that they make it their duty to become advocates for various causes, doing it without regard for the possible consequences.

They think they are supporting something that is good, but they've never really thought through what their support might mean, and what will come out at the end.

I know a lot of causes out there that if they were actually followed through to the end, we would be living in a socialist, or a communist state, and nobody would like it. Nobody would be free.

Jesus said, "The poor you will always have with you." Because that is the case, the question then becomes, "How best can we help them?" Remember Martha and Mary, and what Jesus had to say to Martha?

"Martha, you are getting overwrought about all this. But, Mary has chosen the better thing," I'm paraphrasing, of course. (That is in Luke 10 verses 38 through 42.)

We can take from this vignette of Mary and Martha that Jesus was teaching that there is a point where service and good works become a distraction, and a worry, crowding out the higher duties of listening to Him.

So, we need to remember that even though we want to do good works, they will never save us. They are a fruit of righteousness. They are not the goal, or the end. They just show that we have inculcated into us a part of God's character, and the natural outgrowth of that is good works.

Now, I was going to go through several points about how we can give, or what things we need to have in mind as we give, but I don't have time for that. I will summarize a few of those things. The first one is, Give according to your ability, or abilities.

Luke 11:41 But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you.

What He is saying is that God does not expect us to give out of our own poverty, or to put our family at risk to help other people, or to give in any way things that we don't have. The best gifts that we can give are things that we already have to give. Things from inside us, as it literally says. It says in my margin, "Give alms of what is inside."

Give alms—give help to others from what is produced by the character you have already built.

And that way you know it will be a pure offering and acceptable—not only to the person who receives it, but to God also. We're to be living sacrifices, remember; we're supposed to be sweet savorers in our dedication to both God and to man. It comes out in our good works.

And so if we give of what we have already built within us, then that is an acceptable and a pure offering before God. Remember the widow's mite? It wasn't the amount she gave, but the relative value of what she gave. She gave of what she had.

II Corinthians 8 shows us another thing. God judges according to what we have, and what we do with it. So, we should give freely, and generously, and cheerfully without grudging, knowing that we will reap what we sow.

II Corinthians 8:12 For if there is first a willing mind, *it is* accepted according to what one has, *and* not according to what he does not have.

God never expects us to give more than we have. If you have a willing mind to give, give what you have. God will notice.

Proverbs 14: 31, just to put the icing on the cake:

Proverbs 14:31 He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, But he who honors Him has mercy on the needy.

This should be at the foundation of any kind of giving that we do. Our ultimate aim is to honor God.

If we keep this in the forefront of our mind when we're doing these things, we will have a better chance of actually giving and doing the right thing for people, because God is there. God is watching.

Finally, I want to close without comment in Hebrews 13, verse 16, just a small admonition as we close.

Hebrews 13:16 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.