

The war on poverty has been waged since the 1960's. It doesn't seem to be much of a war. If the goal was to get rid of poverty in this country, the war has failed. In fact in the last decade the number in poverty has grown to new records. Surely there are many reasons. Practically it means that a lot of people know someone struggling financially. It might be someone really close to you. They might even be family. It might even be you.

With a war on poverty have come government programs to fight poverty. As a society where people are struggling financially there is pressure to take action. In 2010 one in three Americans received some sort of financial assistance from the government. Some still manage to fall between the cracks. Non-profit organizations step up then to fill those cracks. Even churches rush to help wherever they can to get people the financial assistance they need.

Would you be surprised to hear that this is not what the church should be doing? Paul gives us insight into God's will for his church and for his people. It isn't first and foremost providing food and shelter. It's not helping with the grocery bill or paying for people's electricity. The second lesson tells us God has provided us with a far greater avenue when we need financial aid...

God's will: money for the family

Back in November of 1986 my grandma became a widow. She hadn't yet retired but that was only a short couple of months away. She lived until July 2011. So for twenty four years she lived without working or receiving a paycheck. She was cared for the entire time. She always had a house, always had groceries, and was always able to pay the utilities. How was she able to do this without receiving a regular paycheck from working? It was a variety of sources but the majority came from the retirement my grandpa had set up before he died. That was her main source of income. My grandpa was caring for my grandma even after he died.

Widows in Paul's day found things much harder. A woman whose husband died had a much harder time providing for herself. Her husband was her income source, her home, and her livelihood. Those young enough could marry again and be supported. Older widows didn't have that option. **"The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help."** Widows relied on God. But Paul doesn't say God will just plop money each day down on the dresser for food. He doesn't suggest that clothes will fall from heaven. Financial assistance was never guaranteed by magic. Instead God built help into the life of widows. It came in the form of family.

More and more families have difficult choices to make. If grandma is living alone after grandpa dies, do we let her move in? Nursing homes aren't always the nicest places but what if dad needs more care than I can give at home, is it alright to put him in a nursing home? And then who pays? Me, my siblings, the government? I'm sure some of you have faced similar decisions. People live longer, the economy is harder. Seniors wonder who will care for them when they need it. And it's not just seniors and older adults. Individuals and families of all ages get themselves into or find themselves in tough financial situations. Then they wonder where help will come from. Decisions aren't easy. Taking care of an additional person who should be self sufficient adds expense to your burden. Grandma in one room means one less for the kids. Those needing more constant care might mean taking off work or quitting. Necessary medications take away money from supporting your family.

Difficult situations combined with self centered thoughts and desires means individuals in need can't always count on God's provided means of help. They can't always count on the rest of their family. This is where government assistance has really taken over. Instead of taking on the care of a family member people have come to rely on the government to do that. People just figure the government will step in and pay for living expenses if necessary. You don't worry about a family member struggling with rent because the government will help. Pretty much if one of your family members has a need and you just don't want the hassle or the expense of helping there's probably a government program they'll get help from. But escaping hassle or burden isn't what God wants. He's given you money and resources; perhaps you need to be reminded of what God's will is for you and for your money. You need to use your money to provide for your family.

Listen as Paul gives you a breakdown. **"But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God."** It's not just widows, anyone who has family should expect that family will help. It's really just putting faith into action. Helping is repayment for everything your parents and grandparents did. And it's the right thing to do because they're your family. It's the right thing to do because it's pleasing to God. After all God gave us this family as a blessing on earth. These are people we share a close connection with, hopefully a common faith too. Because of Christ Jesus and by faith only in him we will see these family again. So we want to care for them while we live on this earth.

Notice who Paul does not mention caring for needy family members. He never mentions the church. It's not that the church doesn't step up if necessary. Some widows or individuals really don't have family because they all die before them. Some individuals have families too small or broken up to help. Whenever there's no family the church fulfills its obligation to Christian love. But that shouldn't be the norm. The church has a much bigger responsibility. The church teaches families what their responsibilities are to care for family. The church must go and preach God's Word and Christ so that individuals are properly motivated to care for their family. If the church gets caught up in providing for all sorts of families and people in need then who's going to preach God's Word and share Jesus? That falls to the church alone. Not the government, not a non-profit organization. The church must.

I want to impress on you two things regarding this. First, Paul is serious about the responsibility that falls on family members to help other family members in need. **“If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”** If you have family that needs help, genuine help, and you have the ability but you don't help, you might be denying the faith. If you're in charge of providing for a family and you waste money and resources, gamble it all away, or spend it on foolish things you might be denying the faith. That faith comes from God. God's will is that you use your money to provide for family members. If you don't, if you refuse, then you're in danger of denying the faith that comes from God. To lose your faith after knowing Jesus because you don't follow through in this area it would be worse than being an unbeliever. They never had God's truth. Someone who did but denied is worse off.

The second thing to impress on you is that not every situation will be decided the same. Many factors go into your decision to help or not. You might find yourself in a tough spot financially. You might have responsibilities to family of your own and if you helped them your family would suffer. Whatever your particular situation it will differ from everybody else. But no matter your situation, most important, is to know what God's will is for your money. Part of that is sacrificing of yourself if necessary to support family where and when you can.

Whether you have a whole big family under your care or if you're providing for yourself God has given each of us so much more than just money to use to support others in our family. He's given to us his own Son Jesus. He was given for us in our place as our substitute. Jesus was how God provided for his family. Through Jesus we who were once outside that family have been brought into the family of God. We needed more than financial assistance, we needed spiritual assistance. We got it from God himself. Receive from him financial blessings and all blessings joyfully and thankfully. Start with your own family and support them financially. Most important make sure you support them spiritually by showing them Jesus so they know and will spend eternity with you in heaven.