



Rockwood Church of Christ

The Proclaimer

August 9, 2015

P.O. Box 416
129 S. Chamberlain Ave.
Rockwood, TN 37854
865-354-0855

Elders:

Dana Carter
Kenneth Carter
Don Chandler

Deacons:

Kendall Bear
Larry Brackett
Roger Carter
Steve McCreary

Minister:

Kirby Hinds

Secretary:

Susan Chandler

Service Times:

Sunday

Bible Study 10 am
Worship Service 10:45 am
Worship Service 6 pm

Wednesday

Bible Study 7:30 pm

Monday

Ladies class 10:00 a.m.

Email:

rockwdcc@gmail.com

Website:

Rockwoodchurchofchrist.com

THE CHALLENGE OF BENEVOLENCE

The word "benevolence" comes from both the Old French and the Latin languages. "Bene" means "well." "Velle" is defined as "to wish." Thus, the word benevolence means "to wish well." It involves a disposition of heart that longs to do good unto others. That desire results in the performance of good works that fulfill the needs of the less fortunate.

The God whom we serve is a benevolent God. Jesus said of him: *"...for He maketh His sun to shine on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:46).* Moses also describes God's benevolence in **Deuteronomy 10:18.** *"He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widows, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment."*

Our benevolent Father also exhorts His children to be benevolent as well. Under the Law of Moses certain parts of the fields could not be gleaned at the harvest. They were to be left for the poor and for the stranger (**Leviticus 19:10; Deuteronomy 24:21**). Under the New Testament, God also commands His children to care for others. *"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10).* And again: *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).*

Benevolence seems like a simple task for the body of Christ, but it is not! In fact, it is a very difficult work for most churches. There are many factors that make it so difficult. First, it involves our feelings for others. Most humans do not enjoy seeing another human being suffer. Our hearts are touched by their pain. We seem to suffer with them. This is compassion. When compassion fills the heart, we immediately desire to help. *"But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him" (Luke 10:32-33).* The problem with compassion is that it knows no limits. We desire to help all who are hurting. In our world there are millions of people who need assistance. The magnitude of the need makes it impossible for us to assist everyone.

A second problem involved in benevolence is that only a specific amount of funds is available to be used to help others. Every individual and every church only has so much food, clothing, and money that can be dispensed to the poor and needy. Thousands of dollars may be needed, but only a few hundred are available. Millions may be needed, but only a few thousand can be given. Once that money has been given, there is no more to give even though the needs are still present.

A third problem that has arisen in benevolence is selfishness. Churches and individuals have been influenced by post-modern thinking. Part of that thinking involves individualism. The thought is: "I am what matters." Individuals have become focused on themselves and their needs instead of focusing on others. Which churches do you think provide the greatest support to the children's homes in our brotherhood? It is the small, older, rural churches that provide the most support. The larger, metropolitan churches have turned inward. Paul spoke to this matter in **Philippians 2:4**. "*Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.*" Following this statement he provides four examples of those who gave themselves unto others: Jesus, Timothy, Epaphroditus, and Himself. Listen to how the apostle describes Timothy: "*For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's*" (**Philippians 2:20-21**). To be benevolent, self has to be placed in the background and others must become our focus.

A fourth difficulty encountered in benevolence is cynicism. There are many people in our society who are looking for a handout. There are many who are trying to "milk the system." Instead of being responsible for themselves, there are some who want others to take care of them. Others feed them. Others house them. Others clothe them. Others pay their light and gas bill. These individuals live off the labors of others. Jesus had this happen to Him during His earthly ministry. He confronted the matter in **John 6:26** "*Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were full.*" Those who engage in benevolent words in the church see people who try to take advantage of the body of Christ. In the process, they become cynical. The cynicism can limit the amount of benevolence a church does.

A fifth difficulty that benevolence has encountered is the erroneous teaching known as anti-ism. The doctrine has two sides. One side states that only saints can be assisted from the church treasury. The other side proclaims that it is wrong to help non-Christians from the church treasury. Passages such as **Galatians 6:10** and **James 1:27** are said to be referring to individual Christians and not to churches. Thus, individual Christians can assist non-Christians, but all Christians collectively cannot render assistance through the church treasury. This doctrine has caused many churches to withdraw their assistance from children's homes and from providing assistance to non-Christians who come by our buildings for assistance.

Churches have many difficulties to overcome in order to practice benevolence effectively. To do this, several things must be done. One, we must devote more time to a Biblical study of benevolence. Two, we must be balanced when it comes to our compassion and our rational thinking about benevolence. Three, we must accept that we can only do so much when giving assistance to others. Jesus was right when He said: "*For ye have the poor always with you...*" (**Matthew 26:11**). Four, we have to constantly fight cynicism. We must investigate all benevolent cases. If we find out someone has taken advantage of us, we accept it. Those who take advantage of benevolence will give account unto the Lord for their actions (**II Corinthians 5:10**). Five, the body of Christ must follow the example of their Head and assist others (**Acts 10:38**). Too, she must love all men. This love is expressed, not in words only, but in deed and in truth (**I John 3:18**).

By Victor M. Eskew