

We thank and praise You, heavenly Father, for all the good gifts of Your creation *given to us* for our use. Grant us the moderation and understanding to use them according to Your will and for our neighbor's benefit, in Christ's name, *who sacrificed His all for us*. Amen. (Luther for the Busy Man, ed. P.D. Pahl, p. 312 *adapted*).

And in the hearing of all the people [Jesus] said to his disciples, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation. "Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

In Christ Jesus, who sacrificed His all in love for all His neighbors, the entire human race, dear fellow redeemed:

Do you love yourself enough to make sacrifices? Well, have you sacrificed eating certain foods for your health? Have you denied yourself certain material purchases, so that you can save up for something holding a higher value? Have you sacrificed certain relationships, which were detrimental to your personal well-being?

We make all such sacrifices for ourselves, but do we truly love neighbor as ourselves willingly making personal sacrifices to help and befriend our neighbor in all his or her needs? In truth, even as sinners we know the value of charity and its appearance, which can give us good reputations. We can easily justify showing charity, which in the end really benefits us significantly more than our

neighbor. However, God's holy Law of Love actually instructs us: **Loving Neighbor as Self Requires Self-Sacrificing Charity.**

## I

The lawyer in our Gospel lesson who approached Jesus wanted to know who his neighbor was which the Law directs him to love as himself in order to inherit eternal life. Jesus proceeded to tell the account of the Good Samaritan. Not only did the Samaritan risk his personal safety in stopping to help his natural enemy who had fallen at the hands of thugs, but sacrificed his time and money to get him to safety and a place of recovery. Unlike the priest and the Levite who passed by on the other side of the road, this Samaritan showed the kind of love required by God from all of us.

When we consider our own dealings with our neighbors, all of us can more readily identify with the priest and the Levite. We might take solace in the fact that we cannot identify with those robbing thugs. But that does not clear us from our sins of omitting doing what the Law of Love requires of us. In addition, many of us can identify with the victim in this story, we too have had to have the kind response of a neighbor to help us in our urgent need at times.

Paul, writing to Pastor Timothy, points out how as we approach the Last Day the ugly behavior of the priest and Levite and

the Scribes in our text will become increasingly common: "... in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power."

This describes the ill behavior of the scribes in our text, who would benefit themselves by devouring widows' homes giving the appearance they were their great defenders, speaking long prayers for them. They had the appearance of godliness and therefore received the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at the feasts. But they could not fool God, who alone must be feared in the eternal condemnation for all such sins of loving self over neighbor.

Jesus was teaching in the temple courts near the treasury where the trumpet shaped collection boxes were located. As people would throw in their coins, one could hear the sound the coins would make. The larger silver coins would reverberate much differently than the small copper coins. The latter is what comprised the two coins the widow cast in. The sound her coins made were a tinny pittance compared to the substantially resounding noise left by the offering of

the others. But it was not the amount that impressed Jesus with the charity of these givers. Rather it was the condition of the heart. The widow gave with faith out of her poverty all the coins that she had, whereas the others gave only from their faithless stingy leftovers. Whose charity was self-sacrificing?

## II

It is possible some of the Scribes with their long pompous robes were among those casting in their abundant charity of leftovers and now stood to hear Jesus' words calling them out, exposing them for their faithless charity. Has your charity in your everyday life been one of self-sacrificing or have you been looking out for your own reputation, seeking to benefit by any and all appearances of charity? You know how hard it can be at times to do things like showing hospitality with only pure motives, seeking the welfare of your neighbor while sacrificing your own. (*Host and hostess may show kindness to the faces of their guests, but then behind their backs secretly roll their eyes in disgust or mumble under their breath their resentment for being taken for granted.*)

Sadly we have to admit that finding even Christians who respond as did the Good Samaritan or the generous widow at the temple treasury would be a rare find. (*Mother Teresa was well known*

*for her selfless acts of charity, but even she found many reasons to confess her sins associated with such acts, seeking forgiveness from her only Savior.)*

Even with the best of intentions the mind of a benevolent Christian will still be assailed by the warped sinful nature's motives, resentments and sense of fairness. In truth there is only One who has truly behaved as the charitable Samaritan and widow, the One who has given His all for His neighbors, 100%, holding nothing back. That One is the Holy One sent by God to take our place, Jesus Christ, our only Savior.

In His great love for us all, Jesus gave it all, suffering our eternal hell and stepping into our death for us. There was nothing else to give, as He said before breathing His last: "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit." The payment was paid in full and what is more He would return to His father's side with the five wounds still visible as the Lamb who was slain for all sinners. No other payment will be needed to be made for all eternity. The heavenly Innkeeper will tend to our needs forever.

Consider how this impacts your opportunities to show charity to your neighbors my fellow redeemed. The whole "appearance" thing, which had the Scribes covering their bases to disguise their greed with a show of charitableness becomes foolishness. Not only

are your sins of selfishness against neighbor all paid for, your righteousness before God in heaven is found in the righteous charitable life of Jesus, your Substitute. Now you get to spend and be spent for your neighbor's welfare unconcerned what ill affects you will personally endure in the process.

The burden of the Law has been graciously lifted from you by Jesus' work on your behalf. Your righteousness does not come by your obeying the Law of loving neighbor as yourself. Your righteousness is found in Jesus alone. But the opportunities abound wherever neighbor is in need. Welcome those opportunities not for appearances sake or for personal benefits, but for the sake of the great needs you find in you neighbors. Start in your homes: with spouse, children, parents, siblings who need your compassionate attention; in the classroom: with those who are challenged by bullies and challenging academics; in the workplace: with those whose home life is distracting or illnesses intrude with devastating financial burdens.

Walking by on the other side, seeking positions of honor and praise are for the uncharitable who know not the One who sacrificed all to save even them. For you, let the charity of your Savior spill over in all that you do and say for the neighbor whose needs are begging for your help and friendship. The joy of self-sacrificing overcomes

any perceived pain as well. The definition of neighbor is not lost on you. Neither are you seeking to justify yourself. Now you get to lose self, trusting that the only One who justifies all has called you to be His own, to live under Him in His kingdom and to serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness forever. Amen.