

# Being a Balanced Servant

James Smyda

Recorded on July 6, 2019

One thing that the Bible clearly commands us all as Christians, throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament, is to be servants to our fellow man—to our brethren and to our fellow human beings. We are commanded, in many places throughout the Bible, that if we see our brother or sister in need—they have some physical need and we have the ability to help them with that—we are commanded to do that.

That is one of our responsibilities: To be a servant and to be helpful to others wherever we can. However, if we don't exercise wisdom in how we fulfill these commands, sometimes even from good intentions—when our desire is to be helpful and to edify God—we can end up accomplishing the opposite. We can end up having our actions be destructive to others, even destructive to ourselves, and not out of any malicious, ill intent; we may have a desire to do good, but if we don't use wisdom in how we do this, sometimes we can accomplish the exact opposite of what we intended to do in the first place.

What I would like to do today is talk about this particular subject. If you would like a title for this sermon, it's:

## Being a Balanced Servant

As Christians we are commanded to be servants to our fellow man, but if we don't exercise wisdom in doing this, we can accomplish the exact opposite of what we were intending to accomplish. Just so you know, this particular sermon today comes by special request. I got a phone call from a church member a couple of months ago; in a conversation I was having with this individual, it was shared with me that sometimes in one's life one can get this subject out of balance—taking too much on while trying to serve others, and so I was asked if I would give a sermon on it, and I promised I would. So today I'm going to try and fulfill that request and cover this particular subject.

As I mentioned, we're commanded numerous times throughout the Bible that as Christians, one of our responsibilities is to be servants to others and to help others whenever we have the ability to do so. Let's take a moment to look at a few of the scriptures that directly command this of us and see that this is a very important subject to God. Turn over to Deuteronomy, chapter 15, and we'll start in verse 7.

**Deuteronomy 15:7** *"If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother,  
8) but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs.*

9) *Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand,' and your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing, and he cry out to the LORD against you, and it become sin among you.*

10) *You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand.*

11) *For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.'* (NKJV)

From the very beginning, when God is working with Ancient Israel, He is commanding this as a responsibility; you are held accountable, such that if you have the ability to help your neighbor, seeing one of them in need, you should do so. You should be willing to help. In fact, we're told in the New Testament, if we're not willing to do this, we can't claim to have the love of God in us. Let's turn over to 1 John 3 and notice this.

**1 John 3:16** *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.*

17) *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?*

18) *My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.* (NKJV)

In other words, we can't just look at Christianity as an intellectual exercise, that it's only about what I believe and what I understand. We can't make the claim that, me and God are good and tight—I love Him and we have a good relationship, it's just other human beings I can't stand or can't tolerate. It doesn't work like that.

One of the ways we show that we have the love of God in us is through our willingness to help our fellow brethren or our fellow human beings when we see them in need. It's an important thing. We can't claim that we have the love of God if we aren't showing love to our neighbor. It's one of the important criteria that we are judged on to determine whether we make it to the Kingdom of God or not. If you turn over to Matthew 25, we can see this. As we go through this, just notice when Christ is separating the sheep from the goats, what criteria He uses in making this discernment.

**Matthew 25:31** *"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.*

32) *All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.* (NKJV)

Notice His focus. What is the criteria He is using to separate one from the other?

33) *And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.*

34) *Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:*  
 35) *for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in;*  
 36) *I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'*  
 37) *"Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink?*  
 38) *When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You?*  
 39) *Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'*  
 40) *And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'*  
 41) *"Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:*  
 42) *for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink;*  
 43) *I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'*  
 44) *"Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?'*  
 45) *Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'*  
 46) *And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."* (NKJV)

He said, if you didn't do it to them, you didn't do it to Me. That makes my point I was sharing earlier—we can't just look at it like, I love God and we have a great relationship, and it's just other people I can't stand or tolerate. It doesn't work like that. We demonstrate our love for God by showing our love for other people. That's not all that is entailed in that, but it's certainly one of the important ways that we demonstrate that in our actions. That's clearly something that we as Christians are commanded to do—be willing to help our fellow human beings when we see them in need. However, we have to do this wisely.

As I mentioned before, sometimes we can go about this with good intentions, not out of any malicious desire to cause any harm to anybody we're trying help, but if we don't go about it in a wise manner, we can end up accomplishing the exact opposite of what we set out to do; we can harm others and ourselves, when what we intended to do in the first place was to be helpful. What we have to realize, first of all, is that we have a basic human nature that is deceptive to us. Oftentimes what we think is the right thing to do, isn't the right thing to do. Particularly with regard to this subject, we have to be aware that our emotions can deceive us. If we are acting on our emotions and not sitting back and logically or analytically looking at a given situation, we can go about helping with seemingly good intentions but accomplish the exact opposite of what we intended to do.

First, we'll notice some basic scriptures that tell us about our human nature. Turn to Proverbs 16, verse 25.

**Proverbs 16:25** *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.* (NKJV)

Notice that this is not talking about someone who was setting out to do bad things, who was purposely trying to be destructive—no, it seemed like it was right. This is where a person was taking action with good intentions but it didn't turn out right because what was accomplished was the exact opposite of what that person had in mind. We have to be aware that that's just inherently a part of who we are. We have to be aware of those pitfalls we can fall into, particularly with regard to how our emotions can deceive us. Let's turn over to Jeremiah 17; notice that not only do we have faulty thinking, as carnal human beings, but we have a deceptive nature. We have a mind that can deceive us, and for that reason we think we are doing good, but we are doing the opposite and don't realize it.

**Jeremiah 17:9** *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"* (NKJV)

This can be particularly true if we allow ourselves to think with our emotions. We can get carried away with them and think that we are doing a good thing, when actually our actions are going to end negatively or destructively, even though we didn't set out to maliciously try to do something negative; we were just deceived by our own emotions. The reason I make that particular point is, as we go through this subject today, we are going to look at a number of applications of this subject—how we can set out to be a servant, but do so in unbalanced ways and end up creating the opposite of what we intended. We're certainly not going to cover every example one could possibly cover on this subject; there's no way we could do that in an hour. However, a lot of the principles we're going to talk about apply to more subjects than those we are going to address.

There is a common theme that you'll see throughout everything we're going to talk about today, which is that our emotions can deceive us—we're basically taking an action that's more about making ourselves feel better or appeasing someone else's emotions, but we haven't stepped back and looked at it from a more analytical perspective, to ask, what is the end result of this action? Does it lead to good or does it end up being harmful and destructive in the long run?

Oftentimes the way we can get down this road is to have a faulty definition of what love is. We can tend to look at the subject of love from what I like to call asking the wrong question. We look at it from the perspective of asking, does it feel good? Sometimes we have a definition of love in our heads that goes like this: Love is positive and it's good and it makes people feel happy, and takes away pain, and makes everything joyful at the moment it's happening. That can be a very deceptive definition of love. If we look at how God defines love, He doesn't define it with the question, does it feel good. It's more accurately defined with the question, does it do good. In other words,

ultimately, in the long run, what does love result in and what are its fruits? To answer that clearly, turn over to John 3, and we'll see an example that the Bible uses as one of the ultimate expressions of love. As we look at this, I want you to think about it from this question of, does it feel good or does it do good. If you ask the question, does this feel good, there's nobody in this equation that's having a warm, fuzzy, positive, feel-good day as a result of what we're about to read here. However, it's described in the Bible as one of the ultimate acts of love, and the reason it's described that way is because it does good.

**John 3:16** *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

17) *For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.* (NKJV)

What we're talking about here is God the Father sending Jesus Christ down to earth to be a physical human being, to then be falsely accused of crimes He didn't commit, to be falsely arrested, tortured, and then murdered for something He didn't deserve at all, in any way, shape, or form, because He never sinned; and a Father who had to watch all of this, having the power to stop it the entire time, but who had to sit back and watch it happen, knowing it was for the ultimate good of everyone involved. If you think about it from, does it feel good—we won't take the time to go through Matthew 26, but if you read through that, you can very clearly see what Christ is feeling through all of this.

This is even before the ugly stuff actually happens. This is just Christ's anticipation of it taking place. He is begging multiple times, please, Father, if there is some other Plan B, if there is some way I can skip this, if I can avoid this whole ordeal—He knows this is going to be ugly and agonizing. There is nothing warm and fuzzy about this. He submits to it and the Father allows all this to happen—why?—because it did good, because it accomplished good for everyone in the long run. Nobody was having a warm, fuzzy, positive day when it was taking place. We have to look at love from that perspective, because if we start with that flawed definition of love and try to build on that concept, we come to flawed conclusions because we have a skewed picture of things, expecting that love is always going to feel good. That's a very flawed definition.

Let's start applying all this to the subject I mentioned. We're going to look at the whole issue of helping our neighbor, and our fellow Christians, in times when we feel they are in need. We have to go about this wisely. Again, sometimes when we take action we're just appeasing our own emotions and we don't realize that. Our actions can end up being very destructive to others and the opposite of what we intended to do. Let me start off giving you examples of this. This is something I've had to deal with my entire life, and to give a little background to this, let me back up and build a foundation here.

If you've never met me in person, and only see me when giving a sermon you've watched on our website, or off of a DVD, you always see me standing on a podium behind a lectern. You may not even be aware of this, but I walk with forearm crutches and that is because I was born with a disability called spina bifida; I've dealt with it my

whole life and have lived a very active life in spite of it, but it's something that if a stranger sees me across the room, and doesn't know anything else about me, he or she can immediately look over and think, that guy's on crutches and has some kind of disabling condition. That's true—it's what I like to refer to as a visual disability. Realize when I refer to a visual disability, I'm not in any way referring to impaired eyesight—I'm not referring to blindness or anything of that nature—I'm referring to the concept I just mentioned, where a stranger can see me across the room and know nothing else about me, and think, that person has some kind of disabling condition they deal with. If you have a condition like mine, a concept that you will wind up dealing with regularly, throughout your life, is one I like to refer to as the "self-appointed hero".

What I mean by self-appointed hero is an individual, who, upon seeing you about to do something for yourself, decides that you need their assistance. You didn't request their assistance, they didn't come and ask you if you wanted their assistance, they just decided you need it, and they charge over and proceed to give it to you. Oftentimes, even if you repeatedly tell them, no, thank you—I appreciate the offer, but I have it under control myself—they are often very resistant to hearing that, to the point that I would describe them as being deaf to the word "no". You can tell them no numerous times and they'll ignore you—it's like having a conversation with an aggressive telemarketer. I'm sure you've all, at some point, answered a phone call from a telemarketer who is trying to sell you whatever their product is, and you're really not interested in it, but regardless how many times you try to tell them, no thanks, I'm happy with the service I have, I don't really want that, they respond by dismissing whatever you say and they keep charging forward. Conversations with self-appointed heroes play out very much the same way.

To give you a sense of the magnitude of the issues this can cause, throughout my lifetime, numerous times someone will ask me (because they see I have a disability), what's the greatest challenge you deal with? What's the greatest problem you deal with, and they're expecting me to list some kind of physical obstacle; they're expecting me to say stairways or steep hills, or some type of issue like that, and that's never my answer. I've lived with this all of my life; I know how to manage those obstacles. My answer is always, without question, the self-appointed hero. Let me give you some examples so you can see how this can play out, and then I'm going to explain the psychology of what's going on behind the scenes in this situation. We can extrapolate this to all sorts of examples other than to the specific ones I'm talking about here.

To share with you a true story—this happened about thirty years ago—I was a student at Ambassador College at the time (this was in Big Sandy, Texas), and if you've ever seen the Big Sandy campus, it's this large, sprawled-out campus. On one side of the campus there was a particular classroom that had a long sidewalk that led up to it. In the middle of this sidewalk was a huge tree, right in the path of the sidewalk. The sidewalk led right towards this tree, forked out on both sides of it in a diamond shape, coming back together on the other side, where the sidewalk continued on to the classroom. This tree gave lots of shade around this whole sidewalk area, which was great in the warm summer temperatures, but when it rained a good bit the sidewalk got

all wet; the leaves would fall out of this tree and the tree sap would wash down, along with the dirt off the leaves, and it would be a muddy, slippery mess, between the leaves, the tree sap, the water, and everything else that was there. This was something I was familiar with—I had been on this campus for several years and had managed this walk many times.

One particular day, I'm heading to class; it's lightly misting rain—it had rained heavily earlier that day so everything is thoroughly wet—but it's only lightly misting at that point. I'm headed towards this particular classroom and there's a student, off to my right in the distance, who sees me, and sees me walking without an umbrella. It's not really raining that heavily, I'm just trying to get to class as quickly as I can. This guy has an umbrella, so he comes running over and he's going to try and be helpful, and share his umbrella, and I don't fault him for that by any means.

As I see him running up, I immediately know this scenario is headed for trouble; this is not going to be good. The reason I know that is twofold: I see the size of his umbrella, typical of what a college student would have; it folds up really small, it's very practical to carry around, and when you open it up, it's barely big enough to keep one person dry. You're not going to get two people under this thing. As he's charging over next to me, I know what he's about to do—he's going to try to get both of us underneath this umbrella to try and protect us from the rain, which means he's going to walk as close to me as he possibly can; he's going to attempt to be my Siamese twin. This is going to inherently make him a trip hazard because I walk with crutches and may have a wider stance. This is also a slippery surface I need to be careful on, so this is the last thing I need.

The second thing I know from experience is he's likely to make the same mistake that lots of people make when they're around someone like me who is on crutches: When you make a move that they interpret to mean you might be about to stumble, they instinctively grab your arms. Think of that as the equivalent of, I'm going to prevent my buddy from tripping by tying his shoelaces together.

Think about that—you take someone's right and left foot and tie their shoelaces together. Have you kept them from tripping? No, you've guaranteed they are going to trip because now they can't move their feet like they need to, to balance themselves, and you're not a help, you're a problem. So I know what he's going to do on this slick surface if I make a sudden move—he's going to grab my arms and create the problem. I know as he's running up, he's not going to be the solution to the problem that he thinks he is in his own mind. To put it bluntly, he's going to be the problem, and sure enough that's what happens.

As he comes charging over next to me, I'm trying to be kind—he's a nice guy, he just saw someone without an umbrella, and is trying to be friendly and share what he has; he has good intentions and I'm trying to spare his feelings. So he comes running up to me and I try to nicely tell him, no, thank you; I have it under control, just leave me alone and let me go to class. Regardless of how many times I try to nicely tell him, he refuses

to hear this. Just as I expected, within a few seconds after this, he's managed to trip me. Now I'm sliding down on the sidewalk—it's wet with leaves and dirt that's washed down, tree sap and everything—so now I'm getting filthy. I could have been just slightly wet from a lightly misting rain, no big deal, but now I'm really getting dirty. So I stand back up on my feet and nicely tell him, please, go on to class; let me handle this, it will be better that way—he will not hear that. This plays out a couple more times and now I'm completely filthy, I'm totally irritated, my patience and tact are gone, and I raise my voice and very assertively command him to go away. This is the first time he listens to anything I've had to say this entire exchange.

Realize, in his mind, he's the self-appointed hero. He thinks he needs to come in, take charge and save the day; he's the last person who understands what needs to happen in this situation but that's what he's thinking in his mind. Again, his intentions were not to come near and cause a problem; he was trying to be a nice guy—he saw someone in the rain without an umbrella and thought, I have an umbrella and I'll share. I don't fault him for that. Nor do I fault him for the fact that he didn't understand the dynamics of why this would be destructive rather than helpful.

What I fault him for is that he refused to listen to anything I said to him, and because of that he didn't solve a problem, he created one. I could have walked into class just a little bit wet from misting rain that would have evaporated, but now I'm utterly filthy. This is the kind of thing, if you are in my situation where you have what I call a visual disability, where people want to charge in and do this. If you go through a few experiences like the one I just shared with you, you learn to be a lot more assertive on the front end and don't let people escalate it to this level.

Let me help you understand what's going on behind the scenes because as I mentioned, I don't fault this guy—he didn't come into this scenario thinking, I'm going to be malicious and cause a problem; that's not what he was thinking. He saw someone without an umbrella and thought, I have one—I'll share. There's also another dynamic taking place here as well.

Let me share another story to illustrate that. Fast forward a few years and I've already graduated from Ambassador College and am living in the Dallas area. I was asked to guest lecture at the University of North Texas—this is the University where I got my Master's degree and I was asked to guest lecture to a group of graduate students who were pursuing a Master's degree in counseling. This particular class—to make a long story short—focused on a lot of different, unique populations and issues that counselors might deal with, and it was designed to help them understand different populations and unique things they might face. I was asked to come in and speak on the day they were talking about clients with disabilities.

I was presenting on the subject and I talked about this whole phenomenon of the self-appointed hero and the problems this can create. Let me be clear about the context of what took place here prior to the exchange I'm about to share with you. What led up to the guy asking the question I'm about to tell you, was me telling the same story I just



told you here, about the sidewalk in Big Sandy, along with a couple of other examples. What all of them had in common was a situation where an individual is rushing in to provide assistance they think is needed, but the person they are trying to help is repeatedly trying to tell them, no, thank you, I don't need your help, please move on, but they are being ignored and this person is forcing help on them.

This was the common factor in every one of these stories. With that in mind, after I tell all of this, there is a student in the class who raises his hand and asks a question. He looks at me and I see that he is struggling, with his past background and everything he's been taught, to process everything that I have just laid out for them. He looks at me and says, growing up as a Boy Scout, you're taught that you're supposed to help other people. If you see somebody else in need, it's your duty as a good person to go out of your way and provide assistance for them. If you see somebody who you think needs help and you don't go help them, then you feel bad inside, like you've done something wrong. So I see that he is struggling to process all of this.

I stopped and looked at the guy, and said, let me ask you a question. You mention that you feel bad inside if you don't take action and do something; can you tell me what emotion you're talking about? What is that feeling? I already know what he's going to say but I want him to say it because I want him to think this through. He says, I guess I would have to say it's guilt, which is exactly what I expected him to say. So I say, okay, let me ask you another question: If you see someone who you think is in need and you offer assistance to them, and they tell you, no, thank you—they make it pretty clear they don't want it but you force it on them anyway, because it appeases that sense of guilt within you—is that really an act of service? He stopped and thought about it, and I could see he was mulling this over, and you could see the moment when the realization hit him; you could see it in his eyes, and if he had been a cartoon character, the next frame would have shown a lightbulb going on over his head.

You could see that his eyes lit up and he said, I guess since you put it that way, I guess it's not. I said no, sir, it isn't. You have offered—you've done your part in offering assistance to them and they've told you no, they don't want it. Your forcing it on them is not to help them, it's to make you feel better about yourself, because in reality you are totally disregarding them. It's not an act of service, it's an act of selfishness; it just masquerades as an act of service because that's what we're telling ourselves; we're doing this good thing, and, I'm a good person, even when this person is directly telling us what they want—there's no question, they are looking you in the eyes and telling you this is not good, they don't need your help—and you're ignoring it.

That's something we have to think about when considering acts of service to others. Are we doing something that's really going to be beneficial and helpful to the other person, or are we completely ignoring everything they are saying, forcing this on them, because it makes us feel good about ourselves? That's not an act of service, that's a destructive act of selfishness; we're just being deceived by our own emotions.

Before I wrap up this point, when I tell these kind of stories, I typically get questions from people asking, how am I supposed to handle situations like this? If I see someone who looks like they are in need, I don't want to be inconsiderate and not be helpful to them if they might need it, and I certainly don't want to be destructive to other people, so what am I supposed to do? It's a very simple, very common sense process; it has three simple steps that are very often ignored because emotions get in the way and we don't think practically.

Let's start with covering a very basic, biblical principle; turn over to Proverbs 18:13; this is the concept upon which all that I'm about to tell you is based.

**Proverbs 18:13** *He who answers a matter before he hears it, It is folly and shame to him.* (NKJV)

If you think about the example I shared of the guy on the sidewalk in Big Sandy, what did he do? He charged in on the situation, trying to take control and hoping to help, and he ignored everything that was said to him. That's where the problem starts. The simple, three-step process is as follows:

### **1. Ask if they want any assistance in the first place.**

That means you actually asked them a question; you asked if they needed assistance, you didn't just inform them they're about to receive it. Let me tell you how these conversations typically play out. It normally sounds something like this: Let me help you with that; or, I'll get that for you; or, you don't need to do that—here, let me do this for you. Notice not one of these statements is a question. They aren't asking you if you want help, they are telling you that you are about to receive it, and then when you say, no, thank you, they're going to ignore everything you say.

It goes like this: Here, let me get that for you. No, thank you, I've got it. Oh, I don't mind; I don't mind at all! No, thank you, I've got it. Oh, I want to—I want to help! No, thank you. Oh, I insist! Now your only option is to get so assertive that they cannot ignore you. Then they are oftentimes going to be offended because that's the first time they've heard you. They are going to respond as if what you last said came out of nowhere, because they were ignoring everything you said prior to that. Remember, it's a simple, three-step process—just ask them if they want any help in the first place. Step two:

### **2. Actually listen to the answer that they give you.**

If they say, no, thank you, then you've done your duty—it's that simple. You are now done. You offered, you were nice, they said, no, thank you, and you accept that. If there is someone like myself who has dealt with a disabling condition all of their life, if they do need any help, they probably know exactly what help they need and they can say, yes, you can help, and here's what you can do. If they do that, by all means fulfill that request. Step three:

### 3. Stop there.

They asked you to do one thing; they did not ask you to take over the rest of their life. Here's what typically happens. Someone helps someone else, then assumes the following: This person now needs me to run the rest of their life and I should now watch everything they do so I can anticipate their next move, then try to race ahead of them and manage it for them. Not only is this potentially dangerous, it's extremely annoying. You don't want to do that. It's a simple, three-step process: ask them, listen to the answer, stop there. If something else comes up, start back at step one. It's very easy. Just use logic and rational reasoning with this; step away from the emotion. It's not about appeasing your emotions, it's about what's going to help in a practical way, and you assess that by asking questions and listening to the answer. It's common sense if you just step away from the emotion.

There's a number of ways where this whole concept of appeasing our own emotions, or those of others, can get destructive in a number of contexts, even on an individual or a wide-scale basis. As we mentioned from the beginning, the Bible tells us in many cases that we should be willing to help others, if they are in financial need or have other needs; if we have this world's goods and we see them in need, we should be helpful to them. That's very thoroughly talked about in the Bible. Paul has given us some other principles that we need to make sure we also take into consideration, so that we are doing this in balance. Turn over to 2 Thessalonians, chapter 3, and we'll see another area where we can cause a lot of harm if we think with our emotions and don't step back, and logically, analytically ask the question, does it do good?

**2 Thessalonians 3:6** *But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. (NKJV)*

If we keep reading, we'll see what Paul is talking about, as far as what he means by disorderly.

- 7) *For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you;*
- 8) *nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you,*
- 9) *not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.*
- 10) *For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.*
- 11) *For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.*
- 12) *Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.*
- 13) *But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good.*

14) *And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed.*

15) *Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. (NKVJ)*

Paul is taking what we would call a stern approach. Oftentimes we look at such an approach and say, that's kind of harsh, because you're not helping other people who are in need, but Paul is not only going to the point of saying don't subsidize bad behavior, he's talking about the concept of disfellowshipping here, as in, you don't keep fellowship with people who act like this. We can look at that and think, that doesn't make us feel good, that feels like we're being mean.

Think about this and realize, as I like to point out when I talk about these scriptures, that the same God who inspired Paul to write these words is the same God who instituted the third tithe system, who inspired the other statements that we read here in Deuteronomy and in 1 John, that if you are not willing to help out your fellow man, you don't have the love of God, so God is not against helping people in legitimate need.

Paul is not saying, be hard-hearted and turn your back on people who have legitimate needs—that's not at all what he's saying. What he's getting at here is not rewarding and subsidizing bad behavior. Sometimes you see people who are in financial need and it's not because of circumstances beyond their control, sometimes it's because they are unwilling to work, or it's because of really bad decisions that they keep making, again and again. It's not helpful in those situations to reward people for bad behavior. Over the years, I've had to deal with a few situations like this.

One in particular was an individual who had lost his job and was out of work, so the church not only helped him out with third tithe assistance, but I tried to help him find work. I've worked in the recruiting industry for almost twenty years now, so when I saw the situation, I said, let's see to your immediate needs with some financial assistance but let's also see what you're doing with your job search. What avenues have you pursued, what are the areas you could target and ways you could go about this, etc.—well, after working with this individual for a while, I came to see that as fast as I could give him a suggestion to try this avenue or that avenue, his focus was on the list of excuses why he couldn't do it.

You begin to realize that some people just don't want to put any effort into finding work and doing something to support themselves. Then you realize if you keep subsidizing this, you're rewarding negative behavior, and that doesn't end up doing good in the long run, it ends up creating problems. In fact, you can end up causing monumental, catastrophic problems, on a large scale, with that type of philosophy—you initially start off with the thought of helping those in need but you don't go about it wisely, and you end up subsidizing negative behavior, and as a result, you can create monumental, catastrophic problems.

Let me give you an example of that to illustrate my point. Look at the welfare system in the United States, as it has played out over the last fifty-plus years, since the 1960s

when the system as we know it was instituted, and notice its effects on one particular group of people. I'm not in any way picking on this group but when considering all the factors involved, it really creates a clear picture of how welfare programs like these can be destructive rather than good. If you look at the African-American population in the U.S., it's an obvious fact of history that prior to the 1960s, this was a group in American history that had been heavily discriminated against—a lot of persecution in a lot of ways. For nearly a century after the founding of the nation, slavery continued, and even in the century after emancipation, inequality was institutionalized through what's commonly called Jim Crow laws; there was a lot of persecution that truly held this group of Americans down in many ways.

However, if you look at statistics showing the rate of single parenthood in the 1950s, if you were an African-American child born at that time, you had a slightly greater chance of being born into a two-parent family than you did if you were a white child. It was roughly about equal but it was slightly better, in your favor, if you were an African American child, because the family unit was solidly intact. If you look at what happened when the welfare state got instituted and what has happened since then, there has been a monumental change.

Here's what took place. Around that timeframe, when the welfare system in the U.S. really got kicked off, and the major programs that we've known in the last few decades were instituted (not that there weren't other programs prior to that, but that's really when most of it got launched), there was a concentrated effort to specifically try to target this population, not from a predatory standpoint, but to try to be helpful—this is a group of people that has been truly held down and discriminated against and needs some help to be brought up. Thus social workers would go door to door, through urban neighborhoods that were heavily populated by African Americans, to try to familiarize the residents with the programs.

However, the programs were designed to give more financial assistance if the fathers were not in the home. The programs basically incentivized single parenthood. There was a major push to offer benefits. Over time, what happened was an entire culture was created around these programs. Basically the two-parent family structure was decimated and the single-parenthood rate skyrocketed. If you compare it with the statistics of the 1950s, today it's a seventy-five percent illegitimacy rate. You can chart it out and directly tie its rise to the welfare programs begun in the 1960s.

When these problems are discussed from a social studies perspective, you hear the terms "legacy of slavery" or "legacy of racism", but such terms don't align with the facts at all when looking at the decade in which these programs really took off and one charts their outcomes. To illustrate this, I would like to read a portion of an article by Dr. Thomas Sowell, taken from the website [nationalreview.com](http://nationalreview.com), posted May 5, 2015. It's titled, "The Inconvenient Truth about Ghetto Communities' Social Breakdown". If you're not familiar with Dr. Sowell, now retired and well into his eighties, he's a very well-known economist in the U.S. and has his PhD in economics; he has done a lot of writing and research on social policy and is African American himself. An interesting fact is that a

lot of his research is focused on that community and its policies in general. Let me just read to you a portion of his article.

*The “legacy of slavery” argument is not just an excuse for inexcusable behavior in the ghettos. In a larger sense, it’s an evasion of responsibility for the disastrous consequences of the prevailing social vision of our times, and the political policies based on that vision, over the past half century.*

*Anyone who is serious about evidence need only compare black communities as they evolved in the first 100 years after slavery with black communities as they evolved in the first fifty years after the explosive growth of the welfare state, beginning in the 1960s.*

*You would be hard-pressed to find as many ghetto riots prior to the 1960s as we have seen just in the past year, much less in the fifty years since a wave of such riots swept across the country in 1965. We are told that such riots are a result of black poverty and white racism, but in fact—for those who still have some respect for facts—black poverty was far worse, and white racism was far worse, prior to 1960. But violent crime within black ghettos was far less.*

*Murder rates among black males were going down—repeat, down—during the much-lamented 1950s, while it went up after the much celebrated 1960s, reaching levels more than double what they had been before. Most black children were raised in two-parent families prior to the 1960s, but today the great majority of black children are raised in one-parent families.*

*Such trends are not unique to blacks, nor even to the United States. The welfare state has led to remarkably similar trends among the white underclass in England over the same period. Just read [Life at the Bottom](#), by Theodore Dalrymple, a British physician who worked in a hospital in a white slum neighborhood.*

*You cannot take any people, of any color, and exempt them from the requirements of civilization—including work, behavioral standards, personal responsibility, and all the other basic things that the clever intelligentsia disdain—without ruinous consequences to them and to society at large.*

*Non-judgmental subsidies of counterproductive lifestyles are treating people as if they were livestock, to be fed and tended by others in a welfare state, and yet expecting them to develop as human beings have developed when facing the challenges of life themselves.*

*One key fact that keeps getting ignored is that the poverty rate among black married couples has been in single digits every year since 1994. Behavior matters and facts matter, more than the prevailing social visions or political empires built on those visions.*

What he's getting at is if you subsidize negative behavior you create a program that basically incentivizes single parenthood, such that financial benefits are awarded to those having more and more illegitimate children, and you end up causing harm.

These programs get justified from the perspective of, we need to be compassionate—we have to be giving to the poor and needy, and yes, we do need to be compassionate in giving to others but we have to be wise in the way we go about it. It's easy for emotions to be played upon, and to think we have to continue subsidizing what's leading to bad results. That ends up being destructive. We have to step back from a situation—away from all of the emotion—and ask the question, does it do good? In other words, how does this movie end? If we keep making a particular error, what's the end result and what's it going to lead to in the long term? Sometimes if we focus only on the emotion at the moment of feeling good about ourselves, or on wanting to appease the emotions of others, we enable destruction in the name of doing good.

Other examples of this, in terms of social policy, are minimum wage laws. I'm sure you've probably seen over the last few years where areas of the country have pushed for a \$15 per hour minimum wage, or they focus on fast-food workers—these are the most vulnerable people, we need to pay them all \$15 an hour. You'll see lots of appeals to compassion and love and caring about people when this is being done, but follow up a year later after a policy like this has been instituted, and here's what you're going to find.

Many of the businesses that employed these workers have closed because they couldn't make a profit and couldn't pay the employee wages. These workers aren't making more money because they're now unemployed. The whole debacle started with the fast food industry across the country, and, having worked in recruiting for years, I looked at this and thought, I already know how this is going to end. It wasn't long before we started seeing reports of different chains looking into ways to automate, where customers could enter a fast food restaurant and walk up to a little electronic kiosk, press some buttons and place their own order, and now the business doesn't have to pay \$15 per hour to someone who is taking your order, you just place it yourself.

Guess what happened to the people they were trying to help with this wage increase—they don't have a job at all now. With this type of thing it's very easy to know the outcome—it's been well-documented for years, not only in this country but all over the world. If you look at the works of Thomas Sowell or Walter Williams, it's very easy to examine the data to see how this has come to be. Very often such data gets ignored because people are focused on the emotions—we care, we're compassionate, and we want to help others, and the emotional energy that gets run with these policies pushes the facts aside so that no one looks at what is the end result.

Something we have to be aware of is the whole issue of confusing guilt with compassion—with our own emotions—because that justifies all manner of destructive behavior. Just to further back this up, let me quote from another article by Dr. Thomas Sowell. This is a portion of an essay that he wrote called "Compassion Versus Guilt" from February 26, 1984.

*Many of our attempts to share our good fortune with others, at home and abroad, have undermined the very efforts, standards and values that make that good fortune possible. Trying to ease our own guilt feelings is very different from trying to advance the less fortunate. Deep thinkers who look everywhere for the mysterious causes of poverty, ignorance, crime and war need look no further than their own mirrors. We were all born into this world poor and ignorant, and with thoroughly selfish and barbaric impulses. Those of us who turn out any other way do so largely through the efforts of others, who civilized us before we got big enough to do too much damage to the world ourselves. But for these efforts, we might well be on welfare or in the penitentiary. We owe gratitude for those efforts, not guilt for those that didn't get them. We certainly cannot make it up to those without values by easing standards and letting them become a burden and threat to others. That is buying a good conscience or a good image with an I.O.U to be paid by somebody else. Those who want to share their good fortune can share their sources of that good fortune; the skills, values, discipline that mean productivity. Those who want to ease their burden of guilt should seek professional help at their own expense, not make policy at everyone else's expense.*

That's what often happens; we're driven by emotion to feel good about ourselves, and thus we can wreak havoc on other people.

We can apply this principle to many examples outside of the specific ones I've illustrated here. Let's look at another application of this greater subject. We've talked about situations where someone acts in the manner of what I like to call the self-appointed hero; in other words, they appointed themselves to a role that no one really asked them to fill and problems arise from that. We can also take on roles we were asked to fill or were legitimately put into, but if we don't sit back from our own emotions, or the circumstances that are happening at the moment, and look at the long-term picture, sometimes we can do damage with that as well. There's a good example of this in Exodus 18, in a conversation that Moses had with his father-in-law.

**Exodus 18:13** *And so it was, on the next day, that Moses sat to judge the people; and the people stood before Moses from morning until evening.*

14) *So when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he did for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit, and all the people stand before you from morning until evening?"*

15) *And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God.*

16) *When they have a difficulty, they come to me, and I judge between one and another; and I make known the statutes of God and His laws."*

17) *So Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you do is not good.*

He's about to point out to him that it doesn't do good.



18) *Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself.*

19) *Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God.*

20) *And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do.*

21) *Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.*

22) *And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you.*

23) *If you do this thing, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people will also go to their place in peace.”*

24) *So Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said.*

25) *And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people: rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.*

26) *So they judged the people at all times; the hard cases they brought to Moses, but they judged every small case themselves. (NKJV)*

Notice, Moses didn't appoint himself into this role; it wasn't like no one asked him to be in this role and he pushed himself into it—no—God revealed His intentions at the burning bush and told Moses, I have a job for you, and put him in this role of leading Israel. So he's legitimately in this role but he's not going about it in a wise manner. As I like to put it, he's trying to run a marathon the way you would run a sprint. If you think in terms of a sprint, it's about one quarter of a mile, and you run it as hard and as fast as you possibly can. But you can't run a 26-mile marathon like that—you'll die; your body can't handle that and you will burn out before you ever finish the race.

Moses is looking at this, thinking, it's my responsibility to serve the people—yes, God put him in this role, that's true—but he doesn't step back and say, wait a minute, is this the best way to do it and can I sustain this? He can't sustain it and what Jethro is pointing out for him is this is a loss for everybody because it's going to burn Moses out, it's going to frustrate the people, and nobody is going to win in this scenario. Jethro is pointing out that he's not going about this in a wise manner—this is a marathon, Moses, not a sprint, and you have to run it like a marathon; you don't have the resources to do all of this on your own; you've got to delegate and go about this another way. If we look at the principle behind what he's advising, we can apply it in a number of ways. In serving others, we've got to think about this using wisdom; in other words, what is the long-term outcome?

While none of us has been given the massive responsibility of leading a nation of Israelites, we can apply this same principle to ourselves. For example, it's not unusual for a church member to get in a situation where he or she becomes the primary caregiver of a loved one or close friend who is very ill. You want to be caring, serve the loved one and provide what is needful, but if this goes on for an extended period of

time, it can get very taxing, and sometimes people become overwhelmed, and think, this is my loved one, whom I really care about and need to be beside, night and day, every moment, to show how much I care.

Sometimes it's wiser to sit back and look at this from the approach of a marathon runner rather than a sprinter. What I mean by this is, if you borrow a concept from what's known as hospice care—enacted once an individual has been diagnosed to have less than six months to live—an inherent part of hospice care is what is called respite care. In other words, hospice services will arrange to provide support to the caregiver of the person who is terminally ill; they will send in a qualified person to take care of the one who is ill for a weekend, for example, and allow the primary caretaker to just get a break and have some time away to rest and renew themselves. Oftentimes caregivers resist that, thinking, this is my loved one, I have to be there with them all the time. However, if you pace yourself as a caregiver, then you will be better able, physically and emotionally, to provide care in the long run, which is better for all parties concerned. If you burn out under the strain of caring for the one who is ill, it affects your patience, it affects your ability to give quality care, and it's negative for everybody concerned. So it's good at times to think in terms of the marathon, not the sprint.

If you have ever taken a commercial air flight, one of the first things the crew members will do before they take off is give you the safety presentation. If you're like a lot of passengers, you may be reading a magazine or checking your phone or talking to the person next to you, but if you pay attention to the safety demonstration, one of the things always addressed is what happens in the scenario where the oxygen supply in the cabin gets compromised. In such a situation, oxygen masks drop down from the ceiling, and they always tell you that if you are an adult traveling with a small child, make sure you put the mask on yourself first, then on the child. If we are thinking emotionally, we typically go the other way—we need to put the mask on the child first.

Think it through logically; the reason this would be happening is because the oxygen supply in the plane has been compromised, or there is reason to believe it has been. In a worst-case scenario, due to lack of oxygen, people start losing consciousness; if the adult faints because his or her mask isn't on, who will now take care of the child? A small child is probably not going to have the mental presence of mind to put the mask on the adult after he or she has passed out. If it goes the other way around, that is, if the adult puts the mask on first, and the child, for lack of oxygen, passes out, the next thing the adult is going to do is put the mask on the child; the child is going to revive, and we're all going to be okay. It's a logical, analytical approach to the situation. It's not what feels good to one's emotions in the moment, it's what does good, if we look at it practically and analytically.

To cover one last point, another way that we sometimes get ourselves into trouble is in taking on the problems of people we really care about, out of good intentions. We can do this sometimes to the point of worrying ourselves sick. The Bible covers an important concept about worry. Turn over to Matthew 6; the principle shown here can

be applied to worrying about people we care about—our loved ones or our friends. Let's begin in verse 25.

**Matthew 6:25** *“Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?*

26) *Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?*

27) *Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?*

28) *“So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin;*

29) *and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.*

30) *Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?*

31) *“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’*

32) *For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.*

33) *But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*

34) *Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (NKJV)*

Christ is explaining to us that God has got everything under control; He will take care of us, and even though we may not see the answer right away, if we are relying on Him, He's going to take care of our basic needs. Not only do we need to apply this concept to ourselves, we also need to apply this concept to others—those we care about who are in circumstances that cause us to worry about their wellbeing. We can pray and ask God to take care of them, and we have to trust Him to do that.

Sometimes we can internalize other people's problems, almost believing ourselves capable of solving them, when in reality we can't. We're really worrying ourselves over something we have no control over. Does that do good? No, it just destroys one's own mental and physical health and is negative to everybody. We have to have faith in God that He will take care of circumstances we have no control over.

This type of thing can become a problem for people who are in the helping professions, such as healthcare or social work, or in ministry or other things of that nature, where one's job is to serve and care for others. The people who get into those careers are generally people who care deeply, who have big hearts and truly want to identify with other people's problems and help them, but sometimes they go overboard and take on things personally that they really can't control, and it becomes a negative thing.

A few years ago I had a good friend—he's also an elder in a church of God organization and had been a local elder for many years—and the organization that he worked for offered him a chance to work full time in the ministry and he took it. We were talking about the whole transition that he was going through at the time, and, knowing what a big-hearted individual he was, I brought this particular concept to his attention. I said, one of things you're going to have to look out for is that you don't try to own the outcome of other people's choices, because if you do, that's going to kill you.

You can't control what other people decide to do in their own life. If you are serving in the ministry, you're trying to teach, you're trying to counsel at times, to help people through difficult situations, but sometimes you give them good advice and they still choose to make bad decisions and go down bad roads, and you can't stop them. All you can do is take responsibility for doing the best you can to help others—the rest you can't control. If you try to take on owning other people's choices, that will kill you, particularly if you are in a job where you're constantly facing those situations.

The point I was making to my friend was that God doesn't even take ownership of our choices. He takes on the responsibility of caring for us, and tries in every way He can to encourage and push us in the right direction, but He leaves the ultimate choice up to us and makes us accountable for it.

Turn over to Deuteronomy 30:15.

**Deuteronomy 30:15** *"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil,*

*16) in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess.*

*17) But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them,*

*18) I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess.*

*19) I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live;*

*20) that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."* (NKJV)

Notice God makes it very clear—I'm giving you a choice; I'm setting before you life and death; I'm teaching you the right way; I'm pleading with you to choose the right way and I'm leading you in that direction, but if you choose wrong and you choose death, I'm going to let you. I'm going to warn you against it, but if you choose that, that's your choice and you're going to have to live with it.

God doesn't even try to take on our own choices, so we can't make the mistake of thinking we can somehow own other people's choices, because we can't. We can only take responsibility for assisting them where we can, and if we have resources to help them in productive ways, then by all means we should do that, but we must not take it to the point that we take responsibility for the outcome of their choices. That's not healthy for anyone involved. It may make us feel good—it may make us feel like a hero at the moment—but it's not going to do good because we all have to stand or fall on our own choices. Our society today loves the idea of the victim—I'm a victim of "fill in the blank" and I'm not responsible for my choices. Read Ezekiel 18 sometime; God does not go for that. He says the soul that sins shall die; individuals stand or fall on their own choices and we have to own that.

As I've covered throughout this sermon, we all have a responsibility, as Christians, to help our fellow human beings. If we have the resources, if we have the ability to help them in their time of need, then by all means we should do so, but we also have to exercise wisdom and solid biblical principles in how we help. If we look at this from the standpoint of just wanting to do good to everybody, and charge ahead, thinking, this will do good because it makes me feel good about me, oftentimes we can be very destructive to others.

We have to look at this from the perspective of using wisdom, and one of the areas where we often go wrong is in letting our emotions deceive us. We get caught up in the emotion of the moment, appeasing our emotions or the emotions of others, and that leads us astray. What we always need to do in these moments is take a step back from the emotion, logically and analytically look at the situation, and ask the key question, does this do good? What is the ultimate result? What is this going to lead to in the long run? Does it do good for everyone in the long run? That's God's definition of love.

It's not always about just making us feel good or making others feel good, it's about doing good in the long run. Yes, as Christians, as we go forward from this Sabbath, let's take seriously our responsibility to help others. Let's help our fellow human beings in whatever ways we can, because that's an important part of being a Christian, but let's make sure we do it with wisdom. Again, the pivotal question to always ask ourselves is, does it do good?