

10

“...Hungry and You Fed Me”

Re-introducing the concept of the kinsman-redeemer



THE MEETING WAS INTO ITS SIXTH HOUR AND tempers were short. The six members of the board of the Christian school had finished all but one item on the agenda: awarding scholarships to families of students attending the school. All six members were long-time Christians with jobs in the business community. While none could be considered wealthy, all six were comfortable financially.

Midway through the list of scholarship candidates, one of the members vehemently objected to awarding money to a family on the list. A single mother with four children had applied for a scholarship as she had three children who were hoping to attend the Christian school. No one questioned her financial need, so the group was surprised to hear the objection. The mother had chosen not to work so she could be home with her children, and as a result was receiving state and federal assistance. While the church she belonged to had helped her during the months just after the husband/father had abandoned them, she was no longer receiving any assistance from

any congregation. Her application also indicated she was receiving no individual assistance from family or friends.

For the next two hours, the board debated whether to award the scholarship to the family. What rankled the objecting board member was he had seen the family “spending money frivolously.”

Later, when pressed to explain what he meant, he described seeing the family eating out at a local fast food franchise. In his opinion, this constituted inappropriate stewardship, and he argued awarding the scholarship would only encourage this activity.

Having met so long, the discussion of the tired board members quickly eroded into emotional outbursts pro and con. It also diverged from the original purpose of awarding the scholarships into broader issues like whether it was right for the mother to choose to stay home instead of working.

If you were on that board, what are the questions you would ask?



Scripture Passages

Deuteronomy 25:5-10

Leviticus 25:25-28

Leviticus 25:47-49

Numbers 35:19-21

Ruth 2:20

Matthew 25:31-45

In Depth

“... a priest ... passed by on the other side of the road ... So, too, a Levite ... passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan ... took pity on him ...” Luke 10:31-33

Workplace Christians rarely consider discussions of the poor to be related to their work world. To be sure, many are engaged in soup kitchens, homeless shelters, United Way and other charitable giving, but rarely do they see the disenfranchised or less fortunate along the path from their cubicle to their car; or from their office to their home.

Many Americans, even many American Christians, worship at the altar of competition, believing it produces the best ideas, the best products and the best prices. Even if it's true (and most of us wouldn't dispute it) inevitably there are people who cannot compete effectively—for a host of reasons—and so fall off the paths of plenty and growth, into dead ends or failure. Like the too-busy, too-arrogant travelers in Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan, our workdays are spent totally focused on the race with an intensity that makes us miss the human impact of that intensity. We pass by these casualties of 'survival of the fittest' with nary a glance. In our worst moments we offer rationalizations for why “it is their fault they are where they are.” Survival of the fittest seems palatable when we're near the top.

So far in making this transition from moral relativity to steadfast character, we've identified the need to withstand criticism without reacting inappropriately, to resolve conflict in ways that honor God, to be committed to truth-telling regardless of the circumstances, and to avoid feeding our illicit appetites and serving the lusts of the flesh.

But a final step in the process of becoming morally steadfast must surely be the development of a helping heart. While part of keeping the Great Commandment is remembering we exist to be in relationship with God, the second part of that commandment is remembering serving others pleases God, as in His demands we care for the widows and the poor.

The wisdom of this Great Commandment is in where it places our focus: on God and other people. When our focus is on others we are better able to withstand the temptations that beckon us to yield to our baser instincts.

But how do we express our love for others in the context of the workplace? And how do we know when helping is the right thing? And whom do we help? Those are the questions for this study.

To begin, let's establish the default mindset of Scripture around the matter of helping those who are less fortunate. Read Matthew 25:31-45. What does this suggest is the default attitude of Scripture towards whether or not we should help others?

Now examine Micah 6:8 and James 1:21. What do these passages add to your thinking about the default response Scripture commands from God’s children?

Is money the central tool being used in these default passages? Why or why not?

Having thus established our default response to people in need is to help them, how do we allocate our own limited energies and fiscal resources? Consider these passages as a model: (Read them consecutively but make notes as you read, and see if a central concept emerges.)

– Deuteronomy 25:5-10

– Leviticus 25:25-28

– Leviticus 25:47-49

– Numbers 35:19-21

– Ruth 2:20

When God established His covenant with Israel and outlined the rules for living in the Books of the Law, He introduced the concept of the kinsman–redeemer; the idea that family members should be the primary source of help for those in need. What problem does this present for our Western workplace culture?

What problems does it present for you?

Do these cultural norms and the problems in your own family relationships release you from your obligations? Why or why not.

If not, what then is required for you to overcome the barriers to being a kinsman-redeemer in your family?

Reviewing the same series of Old Testament passages, what principles of aid emerge under the banner of the kinsman-redeemer?

– Deuteronomy 25:5-10

– Leviticus 25:25-28

– Leviticus 25:47-49

– Numbers 35:19-21

– Ruth 2:20

How can these principles be expanded to include your coworkers into the circle of influence you exert for Christ?

What spiritual lessons might your role as kinsman-redeemer offer to your family and coworkers when exercised properly?

As part of your homework for the week, make a list of the immediate and pressing needs of your family members and coworkers. With money as a last resort, what ways might you act as a kinsman-redeemer in their worlds?

Common Sense and Eternal Principles

- Survival of the fittest is not a Biblical concept.
- Over and over again Scripture measures the maturity and sincerity of a believer by his/her willingness and action in caring for the weaker members of society.
- Our material possessions are not ours to be used selfishly, but are part of the tools God gives us to accomplish His purpose.
- Scripture describes an environment of faith where we care for those closest to us first, including family.
- In addition to our family members, the concept of kinsman-redeemer can be expanded to those in our workplace.
- A Christian’s first obligation in the tending of the Kingdom is to see that the weaker members of society are cared for using the resources God has given us.