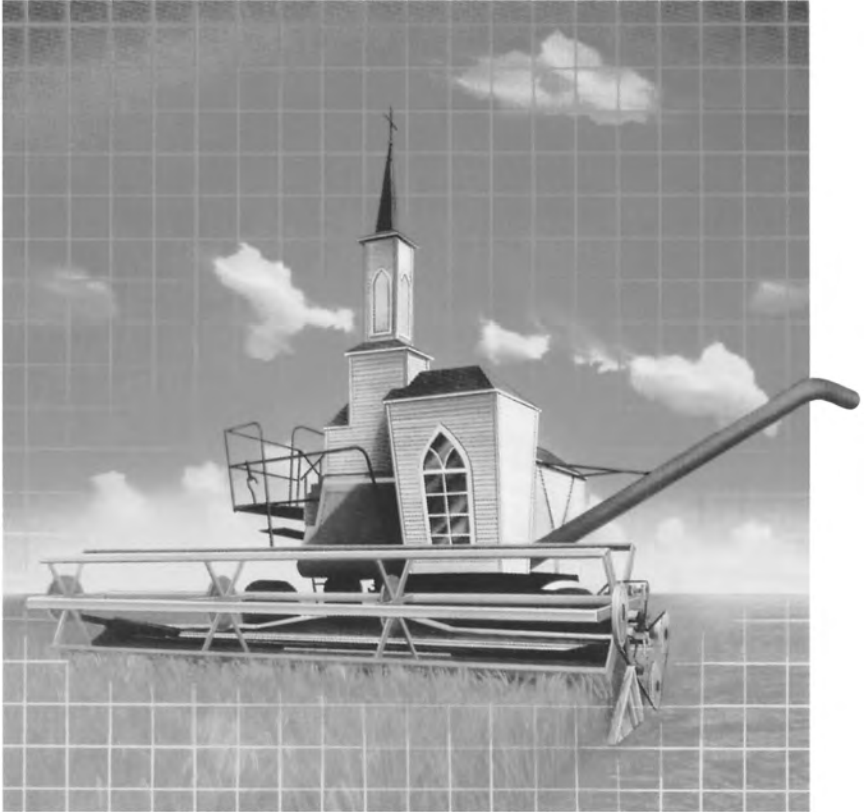


In the Shadow of Plenty



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George Grant

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FOREWORD

By Herbert Schlossberg, Ph.D.,
Author of *Idols for Destruction* and *The Fragrance of Persecution*

In the seventies, eighties, and nineties, there has grown to great intensity a debate within the evangelical world concerning the relative importance of evangelism and social action, the latter of which was understood principally as the helping of the poor. For most of those in the fray on both sides, evangelism meant the preaching of the Gospel to bring people to a saving faith in Christ. The social action side carried a meaning that was somewhat more vague—for some, it meant personal charitable activity; for others, it meant primarily supporting humanitarian activity by the State.

This debate was evidence of a terrible weakness in the church, in both its theology and its practice. Evangelicals were united in their insistence on the Bible as the rule of faith and practice, and yet were unable to realize that the debate was being conducted on grounds that were foreign to Biblical thinking. The Law, the Prophets, the Gospels, and the Epistles are devoid of any idea that there is a contradiction between the communication of God's grace on the one hand and the doing of good works on the other. Indeed, it was in the midst of his missionary journeys that Paul organized the collection of funds for the Christians in Jerusalem who were living in privation. That ministry was the prime example of the unity between believing rightly and doing good.

Throughout the New Testament, love is described as the identifying mark of the Christian community to its pagan neighbors, its authenticating feature, that which proves that God's life is in its midst. James's statement that "faith without works is dead" is of one piece with the entire Biblical witness that the separation of the inner life from the exterior one makes no sense. Similarly, works without faith is of no religious significance except as a continuing testimony of the futility of trying to save ourselves. The task remains for each generation of Christians to ascertain how it can live an integrated life, fully exemplifying the inner and outer dimensions in the wholeness that only Biblical faith makes possible.

Once this is agreed upon, we're ready to address the thorniest issue of those debates: whether our responsibilities to the poor are to

be discharged primarily by personal charitable action or through supporting the humanitarian policies of the State. There may have been some excuse to debate that issue ten years ago, but there is none today. Now that the “War on poverty” has entered its third decade, its record of abysmal failure is becoming increasingly clear. The substitution by officers of the state of humanitarian “good works” for Christian charity has been a disaster almost without precedent.

We now have presented for us in bone-chilling detail by such writers as P. T. Bauer, George Gilder, Marvin Olasky, and Charles Murray how poor people, in our own country and abroad, have been transformed by humanitarian policy into helpless wards of the State, completely dehumanized by the programs that were supposed to be motivated by compassion. The most bitter denunciations of the State welfare system come from the pens of black economists Thomas Sowell, Glen Lowrie, and Walter Williams, fed up with seeing their people destroyed by the policies of “compassion.”

It’s a shame that we have to keep on going over that ground to convince people that State welfare is not the means for being obedient to the Biblical commands to help the poor. Yet, the battle has been largely won on the intellectual front, and we have only a mopping up operation to conduct, as well as the political task of making that victory operational.

But something is missing. If the welfare system is the wrong method for helping the poor, are we sure we want to find the right method? The political left has not been bashful about ascribing opposition to welfare to a callous disregard for the well-being of the poor. There may be something self-serving in that ascription, but there is also some truth in it. A friend of mine, who headed up one of the Reagan administration’s poverty agencies, recently told me of his experiences after taking over the agency from the preceding administration. He found that the political left fought him every step of the way, as he expected. But he also discovered that conservatives opposed him in his quest to see that the legitimate cause of justice for the poor was served. He concluded that many conservatives are not interested in the poor.

Christians should not be in the position of choosing between those opposing pagan ideals. The State is not our savior and we do not look to it for earthly redemption, nor is it the conduit through which we advance our own interests at the expense of our fellow citizens.

That brings us to the questions of how Christians are to obey the Biblical mandate to serve the poor after they have identified the State welfare system for what it is. How can we recognize who we are to help and who we are to avoid helping? How can we accomplish the task through the communal actors and activities that the Biblical commands place at the center of our loyalties: family and Church? How can we ensure that poor people become productive and join us in assisting the helpless, rather than becoming our wards and dependents? How can we translate the prescriptions that worked in pastoral settings three thousand years ago into terms that make them effective in doing God's work in the twenty-first century? Above all, how can we comprehend our responsibility to help the poor in such a way that it is integrated with a Biblical understanding of the lordship of Christ over the whole cosmos, so that we don't isolate this work from the rest of life, thus idolizing it and turning it into something evil?

We're indebted to George Grant for helping us see our way through this complex of issues. Rather than continuing to beat the dead carcass of the welfare system, he leaves the putrefying mess and heads for fresh air. He shows us our real responsibilities, quoting the same Biblical passages as the defenders of public welfare. But he does it without the sense of helplessness and guilt that are the identifying features of humanist preachments, including those erroneously advanced by Christians.

Moreover, he presents the problem to us in its proper historical context. We don't face unprecedented problems; the poor have been with us from the beginning, and the Christian Church has always been doing something about it. C. H. Spurgeon's orphanages in nineteenth-century London were not as famous as his pulpit, but they were as fully a part of his ministry. We're not isolated in either time or space, Dr. Grant shows us, but are part of a community that has given vigorous service to the poor as far back as the ancients and as near as our families and neighbors. The body of Christ is the ministering agent that accomplishes God's commandments, and that includes the ministry to the poor.

But Dr. Grant intends this book to be a manual for service as well as a tool for understanding our true role in helping poor people. We learn in it how to make visible the hidden poor; how to gather and distribute food; how to find lodging for the homeless; how to minister spiritually as we help physically; how to anticipate and protect against legal challenges; how to work together as families and communities, thus avoiding defeat by the insidious atomization

that is wreaking so much havoc on the larger society—all within the context of Biblical truth.

I have not read anything else so useful in helping us move away from the necessary but limited task of criticism and toward practical accomplishment in this vital area. Dr. Grant has based his work on solid analysis, solid theology, and solid experience. But it's not the last word. If we're able to put what he has told us into practice, we should be able to build up a solid body of knowledge that will make the next manual that much more useful. This process is called standing on the shoulders of our predecessors. I think Dr. Grant will be happy to have his shoulders stood upon.

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

There is starving in the shadow of plenty.
Still.

Poverty abounds in the midst of affluence. And this, despite a massive "war on poverty" that has marshaled billions of dollars, thousands of experts, and hundreds of programs into an unprecedented arsenal of social activism.

Pitiful ragmen haunt the garbage-strewn alleyways just off Michigan Avenue in Chicago.

Ruthless teenage gangs, riven with hunger and hopelessness, pillage the barrios of east L.A.

Young mothers from Gary, Indiana's "burned over district" frequent the infamous "lakeside strip," made over in skintight gold lame and spandex, supplementing welfare with a few "tricks" on the sly.

With their every earthly possession crammed into filthy shopping bags, the homeless women of Manhattan's midtown wander aimlessly through the rush-hour crowds in Grand Central Station.

Tenement dwellers in east St. Louis line up in swollen fury outside dilapidated government buildings after their food stamps allotment fails to suffice to the end of the month.

In a tent city hugging the bank of the San Jacinto River just north of Houston's vast petrochemical complex, elementary school children disembark from their buses and trudge slowly through the muck and the mire toward the cardboard shanties they call "home."

The "war on poverty" was supposed to rid our land of the horrid specter of hunger and privation. It was supposed to fit every citizen for productivity and self-sufficiency. It was supposed to usher in a

new era of abundance and prosperity. According to its champion, President Lyndon Johnson, it was supposed "to eliminate the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty."

But more than three decades later, the paradox remains. The "war on poverty" is a dismal failure. Even more recent Presidents like Bill Clinton have had to admit that big government welfare programs have created a permanent underclass of hopeless Americans.

Poverty is actually increasing. In 1950, one-in-twelve Americans (about 21 million) lived below the poverty line. In 1979, that figure had risen to one-in-nine (about 26 million). Today, one-in-seven (36.5 million) fall below the line.

More than twenty percent of all American children live in poverty (up from 9.3% in 1950 and 14.9% in 1970). And for black children under age six, the figures are even more dismal: a record 51.2%.

Today, 24.3% percent of elderly women living alone live in poverty, all too often in abject poverty, up from a mere 7% in 1954.

As many as three million Americans are homeless, living out of the backs of their cars, under bridges, in abandoned warehouses, atop street side heating grates, or in lice-infested public shelters. Even at the height of the depression, when dust-bowl refugees met with the "grapes of wrath" on America's highways and byways, there have never been so many dispossessed wanderers.

Crime is up. Educational standards are down. Unemployment figures have finally climbed down from "recession" highs to "recovery" lows, but before the bureaucrats strike up the band, close scrutiny should be given to the fact that long-term and hard-core unemployment continues unabated.

Amidst all this human carnage, where have the masterminds behind the "war on poverty" been? What have they been doing?

Very simply, they have been squandering vast amounts of time, money, and resources.

In 1951, spending for all the government's social welfare programs barely topped \$4 billion. By 1976, the "Great Society" had far superseded the legacy of "Camelot," spending \$34.6 billion. In 1981, welfare activists were appalled by the "Scrooge" sentiment in Washington when social welfare spending was "limited" to a "mere" \$316.6 billion! The figure for 1997 topped one trillion dollars!

Food stamps spending rose from \$577 million in 1970 to an astonishing high of \$26 billion in 1995.

In the two and a half decades since the Eisenhower administration vacated the White House, since the "war on poverty" was initi-

ated: health and medical expenditures have increased sixfold (in constant dollars); public assistance costs have risen *thirteenfold* (again in constant dollars); education expenditures outstripped pre-reform levels *twenty-four times*; social insurance costs rose *twenty-seven times*; and housing costs inflated a whopping *one hundred twenty-nine times*.

By 1996, social welfare spending of every sort, including social security, Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Unemployment Insurance, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Workman's Compensation, and Food Stamps claimed 52.7% of the federal budget.

But instead of making things better, this extremely costly, ever-escalating "war on poverty" has only made things worse. The very policies that were intended to *help* the poor have only aggravated their problems. Welfare policies have undermined families, encouraged promiscuity, promoted dependence, and provided disincentives to work and industry.

The "war on poverty" has been fought with righteous verve and passionate zeal. But what are the spoils of this "war"?

There is more misery than ever before.

There is more hopelessness than ever before.

There is more poverty than ever before.

Why?

Why have all the best-laid plans fallen to ruin? Why have all the grandest of resources been so blatantly squandered? Why has the "war" been an utter failure?

Why? Because the "war on poverty" completely ignored, and as a consequence violated, God's blueprint for living: the Bible.

The bureaucrats in Washington who have waged the "war on poverty" over the years certainly cannot be faulted for their concern over the plight of the poor (Psalm 41:1). Where they went wrong was in taking matters into their own hands. Instead of adhering to the wise and inerrant counsel of scripture, they "did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 21:25). For all their good intentions, their programs were blatantly man centered. In other words, they were humanistic!

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Thus, to attempt the "good work" of poverty relief without taking heed to the clear instructions of the Bible is utter foolishness (Romans 1:18-23). It is to invite inad-

equacy and incompetency (Deuteronomy 28:15). All such attempts are doomed to frustration and failure, as the “war on poverty” has so amply and aptly proven. Humanism and its various programs, policies, and agendas can’t work, because humanism is out of touch with reality (Ephesians 5:6). It is fraught with fantasy (Colossians 2:8). Only the Bible can tell us of things as they really are (Psalm 19:7–11). Only the Bible faces reality squarely, practically, completely, and honestly (Deuteronomy 30:11–14). Thus, only the Bible can illumine genuine solutions to the problems that plague mankind (Psalm 119:105).

This book’s primary intention is to look simply and briefly at what the Bible says about poverty relief. What does Scripture teach concerning welfare? Or work? Or charity? Or entitlement programs? What about the civil government’s role? Or that of private initiative? Or the churches? And what about income redistribution? What does the Bible really say about justice, mercy, and compassion? Or civil rights and affirmative action? Or oppression and bondage?

Once a clear and principled picture has been drawn of the Bible’s blueprint for relief, then—and only then—can specific policy recommendations be made (Deuteronomy 15:4–8). Only then can strategies be outlined, tactics designed, and programs initiated (Joshua 1:8).

But, don’t get the idea that simply because this book focuses most of its attention on Biblical principles that it is a book of theory and not a book of practice. Because the Bible is itself by nature practical (Proverbs 3:5–6), this book is inevitably practical as well. In fact, we hope that it will prove to be helpful as a manual for action (James 1:22).

Christian philosopher Cornelius Van Til has said, “the Bible is authoritative on everything of which it speaks. And it speaks of everything.” Even of such mundane matters as poverty and welfare. Thus, to evoke Scripture’s blueprint for our cosmopolitan culture’s complex dilemmas is not some naive resurrection of musty, dusty archaisms. “More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God, and keep it!” (Luke 11:28) for, the Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35).

WORD AND DEED EVANGELISM

Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them (Genesis 3:21).

Poverty is nothing new. It has plagued mankind from the very beginning of time. Almost.

It all started in the garden.

Adam and Eve impoverished themselves amidst the riches of Eden by sinning against God and transgressing His Law. Suddenly, there in the shadow of plenty, they knew real poverty. They became utterly destitute.

Pain and sorrow became their lot (Genesis 3:16). Hardship and calamity became the course of their lives (Genesis 3:17) They fell from riches to rags, from a well-watered garden to a progressively more wretched wasteland (Genesis 3:18–19, 23–24).

When God came to them in the cool of the day, they were huddled together in their misery and their shame (Genesis 3:7–8). He looked upon their broken estate and saw their pitiful poverty.

So how did He respond to them? What did God do?

First, He pronounced a Word of judgement on them. He conducted a kind of courtroom lawsuit against them: questioning, interrogating, cross-examining, and sentencing. He judged their sin (Genesis 3:14–19).

Next, He pronounced a Word of hope for them. He opened the prophetic books and revealed the promise of a Deliverer, a Savior. He gave them good news (Genesis 3:15).

And finally, He confirmed His Word with deeds. He killed an animal (or animals) and clothed them in the hides. He covered

them. He showed them mercy. He matched judgement and grace with charity (Genesis 3:21).

There in the cool of the garden, in the shadow of plenty, God confronted the sin of Adam and Eve. And He did it by meeting their deprivation with judgement first, good news second, and charity third.

This is the Biblical model, the divine model, of *true evangelism*.

True evangelism announces to sinful men that they have disobeyed a Holy God, that He will find them out, and that He will pronounce judgement against them.

True evangelism also offers hope. It tells sinful men that there is a Savior who crushes the serpent's head and redeems them from their plight.

But as essential as those two announcements are, true evangelism is not complete without charity. True evangelism involves both Word and deed.

God *verified* His Word of judgement and His Word of hope with sacrificial, merciful compassion. *That* is true evangelism.

When we proclaim the gospel to the nations, we must take great care to follow this model. If we fail to share God's abhorrence of sin and rebellion, we haven't truly evangelized. If we fail to share God's gracious provision of the cross of Christ, we haven't truly evangelized. This should be quite evident from the Scriptures. But at the same time, if we leave out the charity that *testifies* to the *ultimate* charity of God, then we haven't truly evangelized, either. That should be equally evident from the Scriptures.

Excuses, Excuses

Have you ever noticed the excuses that Adam and Eve gave for their sin?

Adam said, "The *woman* whom You gave to be with me, *she* gave me of the tree, and I ate" (Genesis 3:12). "Not me! It was her!"

Eve said, "The serpent deceived me and I ate" (Genesis 3:13). "Not me! It was him!"

Now in all fairness, neither of them actually lied. Both excuses were true. But they were *lame* excuses, nonetheless. Both sinners refused to face up to the fact: *They* had actually disobeyed God Almighty. They had no one to blame but themselves.

But blame they did: Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent.

Even that was not the worst of it, though. *Both of them also blamed God*. It was the woman God had given to him who was at

fault, Adam said. In other words, “God, You messed up. You placed me in a poor environment. I was only responding to my circumstances. It’s not my fault, God. It’s *Your* fault!”

Eve said just about the same thing. “Look God, I was deceived. It wasn’t my fault. I’m just a woman. This serpent here is very shrewd. Devilish, even. He knew just how to deceive the likes of me. So why did You let him into the garden? It’s all *Your* fault. You should have known better than to let me be taken advantage off”

This sort of argument is the essence of sinful, rebellious poverty. Wherever it exists, there can be no escape from the downward spiral of want. If we refuse to regard ourselves as responsible agents before God, if we refuse to see our environment as something to be transformed by righteous labor, thrift, and planning for the future, then poverty of body and soul is our inescapable lot. If, like Adam and Eve, we insist that somebody else is responsible for our condition, then we will always be poor.

That is why God issues His Word of *judgement*. He will not let us excuse our sin. He forces us to accept personal responsibility for our sorry lot.

Grace and Charity

But God does not leave us under stern condemnation. He matches judgement with grace and charity.

Adam and Eve sinned. *Then* they tried to cover their sin by their own pitiful works: fig leaf aprons. *Then* they tried to hide from God. *Then* they tried to blame each other, or their environment, or God, or anyone but themselves.

They were deserving of death (Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23). They had eaten the forbidden fruit. But God mercifully relented. Instead of immediately executing His holy wrath upon them, he graciously extended their lives.

And not only that, He graciously tended to their needs as well. He covered them.

God extended their lives by *grace*. He looked forward in time to the death of His Son Jesus, and He afforded them life for the sake of that ultimate sacrifice.

God covered their nakedness with *charity*. He looked forward in time to the robe of Christ’s righteousness and He afforded them covering for the sake of that ultimate substitution.

God gave them *grace* (life). And God gave them *charity* (covering). Clearly, grace and charity are two sides of the same coin. Both come from the same root word in Greek: *charis*. Both flow forth from

the mercy seat of Almighty God. Both are necessary to complete the work of evangelism begun by judgement.

God *gave*. Man received. Grace and charity quick on the heels of judgement. There was no legal obligation involved except the legal obligation that man trust and submit to God.

True evangelism always adheres to this pattern. It involves two clear messages: the coming judgement of God, and God's lawful way of escape in Christ the sin-bearer. Thus, the evangelist actually imitates God's pronouncement of judgement *against* the sinner and grace *to* the sinner when he preaches the gospel.

But if he stops there, he has not truly evangelized. Evangelism is not just words. It also involves deeds. It involves charity by the message-bearer, who imitates God's gift of the coverings to Adam and Eve. God is the model for judgement, grace, *and* charity.

Isaiah's Evangelism

We see this evangelical pattern in the testimony of the prophet Isaiah. He announces judgement. He announces a way of escape. And then he issues a call to charity.

Following God's model he said:

Cry aloud, spare not; Lift up your voice like a trumpet; Declare to My people their transgression, And the house of Jacob their sins.... Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light will break out like the morning, Your healing shall spring forth speedily, And your righteousness shall go before you; The glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; You shall cry, and He will say, "Here I am." If you take away the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, If you extend your soul to the hungry, And satisfy the afflicted soul Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, And your darkness shall be as the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, And satisfy your soul in drought, And strengthen your bones; You shall be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. Those from among you shall build the old waste places; You shall raise up the foundations of many generations; And you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Streets to dwell in (Isaiah 58:1, 6-12).

God made His evangelistic program clear to Isaiah. *First*, he was to tell the people of Judah that they were in sin: “Declare to My people their transgression.” *Second*, he was to reveal the way out: They were to fast in repentance. *Finally*, he was to point them toward righteous charity: They were not to starve themselves in a *ritual* fast, but to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to let the oppressed go free, to feed the hungry, to invite the homeless into their homes, to provide clothing for the naked.

Once again, here is God’s plan of evangelism: First, announce the judgement of sin; second, proclaim the good news of hope; and third, take up the work of charity. First, *wrath against sin*. Second, *grace covering over sin*. And third, *charity soothing the hurts of sin*.

Christ’s Evangelism

Jesus too confirmed this Word and deed pattern of evangelism. When He began His public ministry in the town of Nazareth, He went into the synagogue, as was His custom, and stood up to read. What He read was significant: the passage from Isaiah 61 that deals with the coming of the Messiah.

Who is the Messiah? The Anointed One who preaches the gospel to the poor:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To preach deliverance to the captives, And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18–19).

Isaiah had prophesied that the Anointed One would go into the highways and byways to heal the lame, to give sight to the blind, and to comfort the brokenhearted. Jesus proved His position as the Messiah by doing literally what Isaiah said He would do. So in the synagogue He boldly announced the prophetic fulfillment: “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21).

Christ never shied away from announcing God’s condemnation of sin (Matthew 7:13–23). Neither did He hesitate to announce the good news of hope (Matthew 11:28–30). But without acts of charity to back up those words, He would have seemed just another phony savior, just another false Christ.

Jesus proved He was the Messiah by wedding Word and deed. He authenticated His claims by combining judgement and grace with charity: He took liberty to the captives.

Charity was central to His ministry among us for this reason. He became poor for our sake, meting out charity because that was His Messianic task: to follow God's eternal pattern and save the perishing.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).

We owe everything to Christ. Our riches, however defined, come from Him. He experienced poverty to make our blessings possible. He became a servant for our sake. He exercised charity on our behalf.

And then came the ultimate charity: He suffered death and separation from God His Father for the sake of placating God's eternal wrath against us.

He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.... (Philippians 2:7–10).

Talk about serious charity! Yes, Jesus brought a message of judgement (Matthew 23:13–36). Yes, Jesus brought a message of great hope (Matthew 28:18–20). But He never let those words stand alone. He authenticated them with deeds.

What Does Charity Prove?

To challenge men with the gospel, we must first love them. Isaiah loved the people of Judah. He sacrificed his whole life to bring the message of salvation to those few who would listen. A man who has been loved by God is to show love to others: first, by proclaiming the coming judgement of God, second, by announcing His gracious escape, and third, by demonstrating commitment to God above, caring for the poor and helpless.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and

though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1–3 KJV).

What did charity prove in the life of Jesus? It proved that He cared for men. It proved that He loved them. It proved that He was willing to put His life on the line. It proved that He was being fully obedient to His Father. Finally, it proved that His Words had *authority*, because they were being put into *action*.

Shortly after the announcement of His messianic authority in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus healed a paralyzed man. Jesus stood in front of the Pharisees and lawyers, who were watching to see if He would in any way commit a transgression of God's law. The paralyzed man had been brought to Him in a unique way: his friends had broken a hole in the roof and lowered him down, to avoid the crowd around Jesus.

So when He saw their faith, He said to him, "Man, your sins are forgiven you." And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered and said to them, "Why are you reasoning in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise up and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" He said to the man who was paralyzed, "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." Immediately he rose up before them, took up what he had been lying on, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things today! (Luke 5:20–26).

Jesus first drew attention to the man's sins. *Judgement*. Then He forgave him. *Grace*. And finally, in demonstration of His *authority* to judge and forgive, He raised the man *up*. *Charity*. Word was accompanied by deed.

Notice, that after Christ ministered to the man in this fashion the entire crowd was "amazed." They all "glorified God and were filled with fear." Seeing Word and deed *together*, they said with sheer astonishment, "We have seen strange things today."

Jesus *authenticated* the words of His mouth with the deeds of His hands. Jesus *demonstrated* the reality of His claims. And so the people *believed*.

Why does so much of our evangelism today have so little impact? Why do our best efforts so often fall on deaf ears? Could it be that we have strayed from God's pattern of evangelism? Could it

be that we have stripped Gospel Word of its validity and authenticity by neglecting to accompany it with Gospel charity?

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have deeds? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," and you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have deeds, is dead (James 2:14-17).

The world is looking for *proof*. They want *evidence*.

When Jesus wed Word and deed, the people who heard and saw got their proof. They needed no further evidence. They could see that this Gospel was not simply pie in the sky. It was a Gospel of hope. Real hope. It was a Gospel that made a *difference*.

Talk is cheap. True evangelism isn't.

Giving charity verifies the claims of the Gospel. It tells the world that there is indeed a sovereign gracious God who raises up faithful people, who blesses those people, and who gives them a loving disposition. It tells the world that there is a God who refills empty storehouses, replenishes dry cisterns, restocks depleted threshing floors, and opens hands and hearts. It tells the world that there is a God who instills such confidence in His followers that they can give, never fearing lack, that they can sacrifice, never lacking anything, that they can serve, never doubting provision. It provides proof.

Words of ultimate judgement and consummate hope need something to back them up in the eyes of sinful men. That "something" is charity.

Evangelism simply isn't complete if we fail to follow God's pattern of matching judgement and hope with charity.

Word and Deeds in History

Whenever and wherever the gospel has gone out, the faithful have emphasized the priority of good works, especially works of compassion toward the needy. They have matched the message of judgement and hope with charity. Every great revival in the history of the church, from Paul's missionary journeys to the Reformation, from Athanasius' Alexandrian outreach to America's Great Awakening, has been accompanied by an explosion of Christian care. Hospitals were established. Orphanages were founded. Rescue missions were started. Almshouses were built. Soup kitchens were begun. Charitable societies were incorporated. The hungry were fed,

the naked clothed, and the homeless sheltered. Word was wed to deeds.

This fact has always proven to be the bane of the church's enemies. Apostates can argue theology. They can dispute philosophy. They can subvert history. And they can undermine character. But they are helpless in the face of the church's extraordinary feats of selfless compassion.

Not only did Augustine (354–430) change the face of the church with his brilliant theological treatises, he also transformed the face of Northern Africa, establishing works of charity in thirteen cities, modeling authentic Christianity for the whole of the Roman Empire.

Not only did Bernard of Clairveaux (1090–1153) launch the greatest monastic movement of all time, sparking evangelical fervor throughout France and beyond, he also established a charitable network throughout Europe to care for the poor, a network that has survived to this day.

Not only did John Wyclif (1320–1384) revive interest in the Scriptures during a particularly dismal and degenerate era with his translation of the New Testament into English, he also unleashed a grass-roots movement of lay preachers and relief workers that brought hope to the poor for the first time in over a century.

Not only did Jan Hus (1369–1415) shake the foundations of the medieval church hierarchy with his vibrant evangelistic sermons, he also mobilized a veritable army of workers for emergency relief at a time when central Europe was struck with one disaster after another.

Not only was John Calvin's (1509–1564) Geneva known throughout the world as the center of the Reformation, the hub of the greatest revival since Apostolic days, it was also renowned as a safe haven for all Europe's poor and persecuted, dispossessed, and distressed.

Not only was George Whitefield (1714–1770) the founder of Methodism (John Wesley was brought into the movement and then disciples by Whitefield) as well as the primary instigator of the Great Awakening in America, he was also the primary patron of Georgia's first orphanage and the driving force behind that colony's first relief association and hospital.

Not only was Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892) "the prince of the preachers" proclaiming the good news of "Christ and Him crucified" throughout Victorian England, he was also the founder of over 60 different charitable ministries including hospitals, orphanages, and almshouses.

Not only was Dwight L. Moody (1837–1899) America’s premier evangelist throughout the dark days following the Civil War, he was also responsible for the establishment of over 150 street missions, soup kitchens, clinics, and rescue outreaches.

And on and on and on the story goes. From Francis of Assisi to Francis Schaeffer, from Polycarp to William Carey, obedient believers have always cared for the poor, the helpless, the orphan, and the widow. They wed word and deed.

For them, charity was, and is, central to the gospel task. And as a result, souls were saved, nations converted, and cultures restored. The message of their mouths was validated and authenticated by the work of their hands. The “peace that surpasses all understanding” became the inheritance of many because God’s faithful covenant people kept His commandments.

Isaiah knew that. So did Augustine, Bernard, Wyclif, Hus, Calvin, Whitefield, Spurgeon, Moody, and countless others throughout the church’s glorious march through the ages. They knew “that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who reveres Him and works righteousness, is welcome to Him” (Acts 10:34–35). And this is “the word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:36).

Thus, they knew that righteous deeds of compassion were essential for the fulfillment of the church’s mission and could not be subjugated even to the most critical of tasks: discipleship, pastoral care, or cultural reclamation. They knew that the words of their mouths had to be authenticated by the works of their hands.

Faith at Work

In writing to Titus, the young pastor of Crete’s pioneer church, the Apostle Paul pressed home this fundamental truth with impressive persistence and urgency. The task before Titus was not an easy one. Cretan culture was marked by deceit, ungodliness, sloth, and gluttony (Titus 1:12). And he was to provoke a total Christian reconstruction there! He was to introduce peace with God through Christ. Thus, Paul’s instructions were strategically precise and to the point. Titus was to preach judgement and hope, but he was also to make good deeds the focus of his outreach. Charity was to be a central priority.

Paul wrote:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts,

we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works (Titus 2:11–14).

Word and deed.

This was a very familiar theme for Paul. It wasn't exclusively aimed at the troublesome Cretan culture. Like Isaiah before him, he returned to it at every opportunity. Earlier, he had written to the Ephesian church saying,

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:8–10).

God saves us by grace. There is nothing we can do to merit His favor. We stand condemned under His judgement. Salvation is completely unearned (except by Christ), and undeserved (except to Christ). But we are not saved capriciously, for no reason and no purpose. On the contrary, "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works." We are "His own possession" set apart and purified to be "zealous for good deeds." Word and deed are inseparable. Judgement is answered with grace. Grace is answered with charity. This is the very essence of the evangelistic message.

So, Paul tells Titus he must order his fledgling ministry among the Cretans accordingly. He himself was "to be a pattern of good deeds" (Titus 2:7). He was to teach the people "to be ready for every good work" (Titus 3:1). The older women and the younger women were to be thus instructed, so "that the word of God may not be dishonored" (Titus 2:5); and the bondslaves, "that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things" (Titus 2:10). They were all to "learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful" (Titus 3:14). There were those within the church who professed "to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work" (Titus 1:16). These, Titus was to "rebuke ... sharply, that they may be sound in the faith" (Titus 1:13). He was to "affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works" (Titus 3:8).

As a pastor, Titus had innumerable tasks that he was responsible to fulfill. He had administrative duties (Titus 1:5), doctrinal duties (Titus 2:1), discipling duties (Titus 2:2–10), preaching duties

(Titus 2:15), counseling duties (Titus 3:1–2), and arbitrating duties (Titus 3:12–13). But intertwined with them all, fundamental to them all, were his *charitable* duties.

And what was true for Titus then is true for us all today, for “these things are good and profitable for all men” (Titus 3:8 KJV).

Isaiah knew that. So did Augustine, Bernard, Wyclif, and the others. True evangelism weds *word and deed*. It always has. It always will.

The Bible tells us that if we would obey the command to be generous to the poor, we would ourselves be happy (Proverbs 14:21), God would preserve us (Psalm 41:1–2), we would never suffer need (Proverbs 28:27), we would prosper and be satisfied (Proverbs 11:25), and even be raised up from beds of affliction (Psalm 41:3). God would ordain peace for us (Isaiah 26:12), bless us with peace (Psalm 29:11), give us His peace (John 14:27), guide our feet into the way of peace (Luke 1:79), ever and always speaking peace to us (Psalm 85:8), and grant peace to the land (Leviticus 26:6). God would authenticate our faith, our evangelistic message (James 2:14–26).

Therefore let us be “zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14).

From Pillar to Post

Sadly, like the Israelites in Isaiah’s day, and the Cretans to whom Titus was commissioned to minister, we have turned away from true evangelism to pursue our own twisted agendas.

As it is written, “There is none righteous, no not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks for God. They have all gone out of the way; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one. Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit; The poison of asps is under their lips; Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; Destruction and misery are in their ways; And the way of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Romans 3:10–18).

Our tendency has been to alternate between sanctimonious escapism and humanistic activism. And *neither* represents the Scriptural position. We have either adopted a know-nothing-do-nothing *pietism* that makes us so heavenly minded that we’re no earthly good, or a save-the-starving-third-world-whales bleeding-heart *liberalism* that separates us from the problems God has put on our own doorstep.

Charity is central to the task of evangelism, but we have run from pillar to post, from extreme to extreme with all manner of needless, heedless extravagance. We have perpetrated self-promoting trivialities, self-indulgent mundanities, and self-serving inanities while the nations of the earth languish and perish, never knowing the glorious hope of Christ our Lord.

If we are to have any hope of faithfully fulfilling the Great Commission, if we are ever to “lay hold of the good things of the Lord” (1 Timothy 6:19), then we must begin, “... to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free ... to divide ... bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into the house ...” (Isaiah 58:6–7 NAS).

We cannot afford to play games any longer. There is starving in the shadow of plenty. Young and old, black and white, male and female, the dispossessed cry out. Their voices arise from wretched backwoods hovels in Appalachia, from crime-ridden streets in Philadelphia, from frozen alleyways in Baltimore, from rat-infested tenements in Harlem, from gutted public housing projects in Dallas.

We must answer those voices. With God’s Word of judgement. With God’s Word of hope. And with God’s hand of charity.

Conclusion

The first basic principle in the Biblical blueprint for welfare is that charity completes the work of evangelism. It is *integral* to the evangelistic mandate.

We will never know the full blessings of peace, abundance, and joy that God intends for His faithful people unless we understand this. In fact, we can’t even claim to be His faithful people unless we understand this. Righteous good deeds are the unavoidable results of a life yielded to Christ. They are the fruits of grace. They authenticate, verify, and give evidence to the work of the Spirit. They go hand in hand with the proclaimed Word.

A quick glance at church history shows that this has been the understanding of Christ’s disciples throughout all times, eras, and dispensations. So though discipleship, missions, pastoral care, and education have always occupied the church’s attentions, charity has maintained its priority place of adorning the doctrine of truth with grace and love. Without charity, discipleship, pastoral care, and education are hollow and incomplete; they are unable to get started.

Charity is integral to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Evangelism is weakened without it. In fact, evangelism is not true evangelism without it.

Summary

God responded to the sin of Adam and Eve first by announcing *judgement*, second, by proclaiming *hope*, and third, by extending *charity*.

This divine pattern of wedding word and deed is the Biblical model of true evangelism.

In his evangelistic message to the Israelites, Isaiah followed this pattern, condemning sin, calling for repentance, and outlining a life-style of righteous good deeds.

Jesus too, followed this same pattern, fulfilling the Messianic prophecies that foretold His integration of *Word and deed*.

Thus, when the early Christians began to take the Gospel to the nations, they naturally adhered to the pattern as well. From Titus in Crete to Spurgeon in London, the story has always been the same: charity authenticates the evangelistic message; without it revival tarries.

If we are to ignite the fires of holy devotion and evangelistic effectiveness, then we too must return to this very fundamental truth: *faith without deeds is dead*. Our faithful fulfillment of the Great Commission depends on it.