

**However, we are told that another means of Outreach is  
Mercy Works Explicitly Connected to Christ and His Word**

This point is often misunderstood, so the phrase “explicitly connected” matters greatly. **Mercy works are acts of love for the neighbor**—feeding, clothing, sheltering, healing, visiting, helping. The Church does these because Christ has had mercy on us. The neighbor’s bodily need is real and urgent. **But as outreach, mercy works must be tethered to the Gospel, not detached from it.**

**Biblical pattern** Jesus heals and then teaches (Luke 5; John 9).

The apostles feed widows while continuing in the ministry of the Word (Acts 6).

“Let your light shine before others...” (Matthew 5:16) — not mute charity, but visible faith.

**The danger to avoid** Mercy work by itself is not evangelism.

A soup kitchen that never speaks Christ is good, but it is not Gospel proclamation.

The Church is not an NGO with a cross logo.

Outreach mercy is mercy with a mouth.

**Concrete examples**

**A. Food pantry with the Word**

A church runs a food pantry.

Each distribution includes a short spoken prayer in Jesus’ name, A Scripture reading, A printed Gospel tract, An invitation to worship or Bible class. The food is not conditional on listening—but Christ is clearly confessed.

**B. Disaster relief with pastoral presence**

After a flood or tornado, a church provides cleanup help.

Alongside physical labor, pastors are present to pray with victims; Scripture is read; People are invited to hear more.

Example: “We’re helping because Christ has had mercy on us. If you’d like, we’d be glad to pray with you.”

**C. Medical or counseling missions**

A church supports clinics or counseling services where the Gospel is openly confessed. Chaplaincy is offered. Care is given in Christ’s name

Historically: Hospitals, orphanages, and poorhouses were explicitly Christian institutions with preaching and catechesis built in.

**D. Personal acts of mercy with confession**

Helping a neighbor with repairs, meals, or childcare. When appropriate, explicitly naming Christ. Not forced. Not manipulative. But not silent.

Example: “We’re glad to help. This is part of how Christians try to love because Christ first loved us.”

**3. Why the Explicit Connection Matters Theologically**

Faith comes by hearing (Romans 10:17).

**Good works do not create faith.**

The Gospel must be spoken. Thus, mercy works prepare the soil, but The Word plants the seed.

Luther put it bluntly: “The Church is not built by works, but by the Word.”

**4. A Clear Distinction in One Sentence**

Public preaching and missions proclaim Christ directly to those who have not yet heard.

Mercy works as outreach embody Christ’s love while naming Him openly.

Both are Christ giving Himself—not only in deed, but also in Word.

### **The Book of Acts Shows No Organized Social Reforms Directed at Society**

- The church **does not** address Roman slavery
- The church **does not** campaign against poverty systems
- The church **does not** organize civic reform
- The church **does not** attempt to “transform culture”

Instead, Christians live quietly. They suffer injustice. They do good as individuals. They leave governance to authorities.

**The Book of Acts contains no example of** Church-run hospitals, public welfare institutions, civic activism, justice campaigns, or cultural transformation strategies. However, Christians do act in vocation *within* society — not as “the church.”

#### **The Church**

- Preach the Word
- Administer Sacraments
- Care for believers in need
- Maintain good order
- Pray

#### **Christians in Vocation**

- Show mercy personally
- Do good to neighbors
- Serve quietly
- Endure injustice
- Respect authorities

Examples:

#### **1. Infant Exposure**

In the Greco-Roman world, unwanted infants (especially girls, disabled children, or the poor) were commonly **left to die** or to be taken for slavery. This was **legal, accepted, and widespread**. The state did not intervene.

**In the 1st–2nd centuries**, individual Christians responded by **rescuing exposed infants, raising them as their own. They refused to practice exposure. They did this quietly**, without public agitation.

#### **2. Care During Plagues**

**Pagans** fled cities. Sick family members were abandoned. Bodies were left unburied. In response, Christians stayed behind and nursed the sick (often pagans). They buried the dead, and accepted death as a risk regardless of the danger. Even critics of Christianity noticed this difference.

**In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Julian the Apostate** complains that Christians care for their own poor **and the pagan poor. They outperform** pagan charity, and thus undermine pagan religion by quiet mercy

In a letter to Arsacius, High Priest of Galatia (c. AD 362)

“Why do we not observe that it is **their benevolence to strangers**, their care for the graves of the dead, and the pretended holiness of their lives that have done most to increase atheism? For it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galileans support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us.

This, therefore, ought to be rectified. You ought not to wait for orders from me, but rather to take action yourselves in this matter. Establish many hostels in every city, so that strangers may enjoy our benevolence, and this not only of our own people, but of others also who are in need of assistance.

Provide them with food and wine, for this is a matter of shame to us that the Galileans should be the only people who practice this sort of humanity.

For it is disgraceful that, when the Jews have no beggars, and the impious Galileans support our poor in addition to their own, our people should be seen to lack assistance from us. Teach those of our faith to contribute to public service of this sort, and exhort the priests to be diligent in this matter.”