

The Christian's Duty to be Benevolent

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Introduction: "What Are My Obligations to Give to Those Who Are in Need?"

- A. Most people recognize the morality of giving to those in need.
 - 1. Even those least familiar with the Bible will readily say that the Bible teaches that we are to give to the poor.
 - 2. Ironically, some Christians have overlooked this important good work as an obligation and a responsibility before God.
- B. Christians should understand what the will of the Lord is to be benevolent.
 - 1. Benevolence: "*desire to do good to others; goodwill; charitableness*" or "*an act of kindness; a charitable gift*" (Random House Dictionary).
 - 2. What exactly is the Christian's duty to give to those in need?

I. Three Types of Benevolence as Revealed in the New Testament.

- A. Churches should help other churches who are in need.
 - 1. Example: Paul and his companions came to Jerusalem "*to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings*" (**Acts 24:17; cf. Rom. 15:25-27**).
 - 2. The churches in Macedonia and Achaia made a contribution for the church in Jerusalem, going straight to those in need (No "middleman").
 - 3. Paul referred to this giving as an "offering" (**Acts 24:17**) meaning it was also done unto God to please Him (**cf. 2 Cor. 8:1-9:15**).
 - 4. The New Testament pattern of churches helping other churches in need is evident (e.g., **Acts 11:27-30; Rom. 15:26; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8-9**).
- B. The local church helping their own members in need (e.g., **Acts 2:42-45; 4:32-37; 6:1-7**).
 - 1. Restrictions are given by God on which members should receive benevolence from the funds of the local church (**1 Tim. 5:5-10, 16**).
 - 2. The idea that the church treasury is a welfare fund for the whole world is an idea not revealed in the New Testament.
- C. Individual Christian responsibility to be benevolent.
 - 1. Genuine Christianity is demonstrated when disciples of Christ fulfill their responsibilities to help those in need (**James 1:27**).
 - 2. Who is to visit the widows and the orphans? It is the same person who is to keep oneself unspotted from the world (i.e., the *individual* Christian).

NOTE: "Visit" (EPISKEPTOMAI) is not merely about offering words of encouragement to those in need. To *visit* is "to look upon or after, to inspect, examine with the eyes; to visit, go to see one... *to look upon in order to help or to benefit*" - **Thayer's Greek Lexicon**

- 3. Benevolence is the fruit of Christianity, not the means of increasing it.
 - a. Food and clothing were never offered by the apostles as the *means* of getting people to listen to the gospel message.
 - b. People who are drawn to Christ by benevolence alone will more than likely turn away once charitable gifts have ceased (**Jn. 6:66**).
 - c. If people will not hear the gospel without being enticed with benevolent gifts, their hearts may not be receptive to the truth.
- 4. Nevertheless, the benevolent, good works we do is a powerful example which may lead to opportunities in evangelism (**Mat. 5:16; Gal. 6:10**).

II. Every Christian is to fulfill His/ Her Duty to Help Those in Need.

- A. Genuine repentance is demonstrated by “good fruit” or helping those in need.
 - 1. Repentance is a turning from darkness to light and from Satan to God (**Acts 26:18**) “*performing deeds appropriate to repentance*” (**Acts 26:20**).
 - 2. Sharing what we have with people in need is “good fruit” or evidence of repentance or a changed heart to do God’s will (**Luke 3:8-11**).
- B. Actions (especially) speak louder than words in benevolence.
 - 1. Merely speaking words of encouragement to those impoverished is of little value without the support of our good works (**James 2:14-17**).
 - 2. We must not “close our hearts” to those around us who need our help, especially when we have the ability and opportunity (**1 John 3:17-18**).
- C. Let us not overly concerned about being taken advantage of.
 - 1. Undoubtedly, there are many crooks, scam-artists, and the like that seek a “hand out” instead of a “hand up.”
 - 2. Giving to others can have its risks, yet we must maintain compassion and a willing and generous spirit (**Matt 5:38-42**).
 - 3. Giving to the needy must respect other laws of God such as providing for our families (**1 Tim. 5:8**) and it must not promote sin (**2 Thes. 3:10**).
- D. Let us not be too quick to say that we ourselves are “too poor” to give!
 - 1. Proper giving involves sacrifice, not giving our “leftovers” or surplus to the poor (cf. **Mark 12:41-44**).
 - 2. Sometimes laughably, Americans think of themselves as “too poor” to give to others and quickly excuse themselves from giving much at all.
 - 3. The churches in Macedonia who gave liberally to help the needy saints of Judea despite being poor themselves! (**2 Cor. 8:1-5**).
 - 4. Difficult circumstances should not be used as an excuse to not give at all and to become cheapskates, stingy, or uncharitable.

III. "It is More Blessed to Give Than to Receive" (Acts 20:35).

- A. Blessed are we who give to those in need!
 - 1. Our chief concern should be to please God, not whether those we help have the means to repay us! (**Luke 14:12-14**).
 - 2. We give, not to be given to, but because we know it pleases God and that our Lord will bless us on that last day with the reward of Heaven.
 - 3. Our attitude must not be: "What do I gain from this?"
 - 4. It is a blessed thing to give as we are able to help others, encourage them, and *show* them that we care (e.g., **Luke 10:33-37**).
- B. Laying up treasures in heaven (**Mat. 19:21**).
 - 1. To give to the poor is to lay up treasures in Heaven! (**Mat. 6:19-20**).
 - 2. It is better to please God and store up treasures in heaven rather than hoarding all that we have for ourselves (**1 Tim. 6:17-19**).
 - 3. The most important “storing up” for ourselves we can do is “the treasure of a good foundation for the future” of Eternal life in heaven with God.

Conclusion: Our benevolence will be remembered by the Lord (Mat. 25:31-46).

A failure to do our part to care for the needy can bar us from the gates of heaven!