
Words of Truth

We're Not Supposed To Assist All "Poor" People

By: Brian A. Yeager

Christians are loving people (I Corinthians 16:14, Ephesians 5:1-2, and Colossians 3:14). We do not want to see anyone suffer for any reason (Colossians 3:12). Many people have falsely concluded that doing good to all men means helping everyone who has his or her hand out. The twisting of verses, such as Galatians 6:10 (which is not specifically about helping the needy to begin with), is a common way to reach this false conclusion.

Then you have those people who want the local church to become the social welfare program for anyone who needs money. To be clear, the local church has NO authority to ever assist any poor person who is not a Christian. That is true whether or not that person is really in need. The pattern of the Scriptures shows that the local church is very limited in helping poor, needy saints (Romans 15:25-27, I Corinthians 16:1-4, and II Corinthians 8:1-9:14). In fact, the Scriptures are very clear that even good sisters in Christ are not always allowed assistance from the local church (I Timothy 5:3-16).

The Scriptures do teach us, as individual Christians, to financially assist truly needy people. The Lord says this about helping those who are poor: *"He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he... He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again... I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive"* (Proverbs 14:21, Proverbs 19:17, and Acts 20:35).

This discussion then has to center itself upon who is truly needy and who is not. This question cannot be answered by our own conclusions (Proverbs 3:5-7, Proverbs 28:26, and I Corinthians 3:18-20). This must be something that the Scriptures answer. There are opinions on every side of these matters. Let's leave those opinions out of our study.

Let me give you something to consider before we proceed. Let's say a man comes to you and says he has no job, cannot find one, is a drug addict, has a criminal record, is starving, and he has no place to live. Is this person worthy of your financial assistance? If you say yes, what Scriptural conclusion leads you to that answer? If you say no, the same question applies. What Scriptural reasoning tells you that this person should not be financially assisted? Does the fact that this man admits being a drug addict have an impact on you? What if we removed that point and his criminal record, would that make him worthy of assistance? What if you find out he is a homosexual with a drug problem or a criminal record? If you asked this question to ten people, you may just find ten different responses. Yet, the Scriptures teach us to form our conclusions based upon the Scriptures (Colossians 3:17).

Scripturally Reasoning Who Is Not Really Needy

If a person can work (that would mean he or she is physically capable and employment is possible), then that person should take care of his or her needs through his or her own labor. Notice what the Scriptures have to say about this: *“The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat... For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread”* (Proverbs 13:4 and II Thessalonians 3:10-12).

Did you notice that a form of correction for not working is that the lazy person is supposed to suffer for his or her laziness (Proverbs 20:4 and Proverbs 21:25)? Then, what are you doing if you assist them and allow them to continue in their laziness? Those who refuse to work are not really needy. So, who is needy?

It Should Be Obvious That There Are Real Needs

In the “Parable Of The Good Samaritan” you find a man left for dead on the side of the road. This man was truly in need and was aided. The Lord instructed this: *“...Go, and do thou likewise”* (Luke 10:25-37). When we see someone who cannot (instead of will not) help himself or herself, this is when we see someone who is really in need. The man that was assisted could have had a job. He could have had an investment of some sort. Yet, he could not help himself in that situation. If we can share our material blessings with people in real need, that is a good thing (Ephesians 4:28 and I Timothy 6:17-19).

In this article we asked whether or not a drug addict or homosexual was worthy of our aid. The answer is, if he or she is truly in need they are. You cannot say you won't aid the truly needy homosexual while you will help the truly needy “good person” (by the world's standards). Both the homosexual and drug addict are in the same boat as any other non-believer (Matthew 7:21-23, I Corinthians 6:9-10, Galatians 5:19-21, James 2:10, and Revelation 21:8). Having said that, we do need to make sure that we are not giving people money so that they can go and do evil things (Jeremiah 23:14). Giving ten dollars to an alcoholic will not help them. Additionally, we do not want people to feel justified in their wrong doings because we have helped them either (Ezekiel 13:22).

Conclusion

We cannot possibly cover all scenarios in this article. We'll face all manners of stories when it comes to trying to assist people that seem to be in need of help. Thus, we need to be fruit inspectors (Matthew 7:15-20). Helping someone live to see another day is a good thing. Another day in this world is another day wherein someone has the opportunity to hear and obey the Gospel, which certainly is the Lord's will (I Timothy 2:4 and II Peter 3:7-10). Yet, as we've discussed, we don't want to help someone get his or her next drug high or bottle of beer. So, think things through before you help someone. Be sure there are real needs being met. Being poor doesn't always mean that someone is truly needy and worthy of our assistance.