

Taking Care of the Poor

One of the major themes of the Bible is that God cares about the poor, and He requires us to care about them as well. We have a responsibility to take care of the poor and try to help them, as we have the resources to do so. God promised to richly bless those who bless the poor.

Jesus Himself taught this in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 6:1-4: “Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.”

This passage is commonly used to teach that we must give in secret instead of publicly. That's definitely true: when we give we must not do so with the aim of being seen by other people. If we give for the purpose of being seen and praised by others then we're dishonoring God. The Lord commands us to give secretly, not for reasons of pride or public glory.

However, one point that's easily missed is that this passage is talking about giving *alms*. That refers to giving money or food to the poor. Jesus assumes that we're *definitely* going to provide for the poor, and then teaches us the right way to do that.

The Bible is full of people who gave to the poor and were blessed for it. For example, there's Tabitha:

Acts 9:36: “Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.”

This woman led a life rich in good works. One of those good works was giving alms to the poor. Specifically, she made clothing for them:

Acts 9:39: “Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.”

The reason the friends of Dorcas contacted Peter when she died was because they loved Dorcas and they wanted Peter to *raise her from the dead* (which he did).

There's also Cornelius, the centurion who Peter visited. It's easy to overlook the fact that one of the reasons God sent Peter to him was because of the alms that he gave to the poor:

Acts 10:1-4: “There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.”

This is very important to God! The Lord cares about the poor. He sees them and He sees their needs, and He wants us to do something about those needs. God doesn't want us to turn a blind eye to the poor and to their difficult plight. The book of Psalms tells us that those who are righteous will give to the poor:

Psalm 112:9: “He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honour.”

As you can see, God promised to honor those who give to the poor. Those who help the poor are actually giving to God:

Proverbs 19:17: “He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.”

God promised to repay those who give to the poor. If you want to give something to God then this is the way to do it. If you want to please God with your finances, and honor Him with the money that He's provided to you, then feed the poor:

Proverbs 22:9: “He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor.”

Christians often talk about giving money to the church. However, the Bible has more to say about giving money to the poor than giving to the church! People who give to the church but don't give to the poor are overlooking something that's extremely important to God. Those who ignore the poor and don't help them will be cursed:

Proverbs 28:27: “He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall

have many a curse.”

This world is sadly full of poor people who are struggling to survive, and there are all sorts of ways to help them. In our nation there are many good charities that help the poor, and which are great options to those who are looking for ways to give.

When the rich man asked Jesus what he had to do in order to inherit everlasting life, Jesus told him to give to the poor:

Matthew 19:21: “Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.”

Why was this needed in order to be perfect? First of all, it's *not* because we're saved by our works. The Bible is clear that we're saved by grace, and our works play no part in our salvation. Instead our works *demonstrate* our true nature. Those who are genuinely saved will do good works, because good works are *always* the fruit of genuine salvation. One of the signs of salvation is generously giving to those who are in need. If people can't even bother to do that then they're not saved:

James 2:15-17: “If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.”

Giving to the poor doesn't save us, but it *is* one of the signs that Christ has transformed us into new creatures. It matters!

Now, one thing I want to emphasize is that there's a difference between giving to the poor and giving to the lazy and slothful. It's a noble thing to give to those who are struggling and

in need. However, it's a terrible thing to give to people who are too lazy to work, and who have fallen into poverty for that reason. God requires people to work:

2 Thessalonians 3:10: “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.”

People who are too lazy to work should *not* receive alms. Instead they should go out and get a job! Giving free money and food to people who are lazy doesn't help them because it doesn't solve their real need – which is to *stop being lazy and go get a job.*

God expects those who are lazy to have nothing, because they're unwilling to work for it:

Proverbs 13:4: “The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.”

Notice how God doesn't say that we must give to those who have nothing no matter what the circumstances are. Instead He puts a difference between those who are working and those who can't be bothered to work. When those who refuse to work have nothing, it's their own fault. In that case we should leave them to suffer so that they'll learn to stop being lazy and get a job.

The Bible teaches that there are terrible consequences for being lazy:

Proverbs 20:4: “The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing.”

It's important for people to suffer the consequences of laziness because *that's how they learn to stop being lazy.* Not having any food is a great motivator to go out and get a job. If

people give food to those who are unwilling to work, it encourages laziness (which is something God hates).

When those who are lazy go hungry, they have no one to blame but themselves:

Proverbs 19:15: “Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger.”

Proverbs 21:25: “The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour.”

In summary, we *must* give to the poor. This is something that God *requires*. Christians must care of those who are in need and provide for them as best they can. It's true that it's impossible for us to take care of all the needs of all the poor people in the world, but it ' important for us to do whatever we can. That's all that God requires:

2 Corinthians 8:12: “For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.”

We can't give things that we don't have – but we *can* give out of what God has provided us. We may not be able to meet every need, but we can meet *some* needs – and God will bless those who do.