

New Covenant Theology



New Covenant Giving

- When we looked at the question of tithing, we saw that the standard for New Covenant giving is that we are to give ***generously*** and ***cheerfully*** (without compulsion) (2 Cor. 9:7, 1Tim 6:17-19)
- So for the last few weeks we have been looking at the question: Who all should New Covenant believers be generously and cheerfully giving ***to***?
- We have seen that several categories of giving are mentioned in the NT:
 - Pastors/Elders
 - Ministers of the Gospel
 - The Poor
 - Other Possibilities?

Giving to the Poor - Review

- Last week we looked at a number of NT scriptures that show the importance of giving to the poor:
 - There are a number of passages that directly ***command*** us to give to the poor.
 - There are a number examples in the New Testament of individuals who are:
 - ***Commended*** for being generous
 - ***Condemned*** for ignoring the needs of the poor and helpless.
 - The ***strongest*** warnings in the NT are given to those who will not help a ***brother*** who is in ***desperate*** financial need.

Giving to the Poor - Review

- As we closed last week, I asked you to meditate on the following questions:
 - Is it ever **wrong** (or at least a bad idea) to give to someone in financial need?
 - Are there **limits** to how much we should give to the poor? If so, what are they?
 - Even if we gave away **all** of our money to the poor, we can't help everyone. So how do we go about prioritizing who we **do** help?

When You Should *Not* Give to the Poor

- Near the end of his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul teaches this principle:
 - *For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. ⁹ It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: **If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.** ¹¹ For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. ¹² Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. ¹³ As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. ¹⁴ If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵ Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.* (2Thes. 3:7-15)
- With all the NT teaching on giving to the poor, why, in **this** case, does Paul command us to let someone (presumably a fellow believer!) go without food?!

When You Should *Not* Give to the Poor

- Paul is basically telling us not to even give **food** (much less money!) to someone who is able, but **unwilling**, to provide for their own need.
- Why do you suppose Paul would make such a prohibition? Is he being heartless?
- I believe Paul gives this command out of **love** for the one who will not work! Giving to such a person will:
 - Remove their incentive to work: *The laborer's appetite works for him; his hunger drives him on.* (Prov. 16:26 NIV)
 - Encourage them to continue in sinful laziness: *The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor. All day long he craves and craves...* (Prov. 21:25-26a)
 - Deprive them of a sense of self-respect and the satisfaction that comes from doing honest work and bearing their own load: *for each one should carry his own load* (Gal 6:1 NIV)
 - Rob them of their ability to provide for the needs of others: *...let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.* (Eph. 4:1)
- Therefore to give such a person money or food would be to act in an **unloving** manner towards that person.

***Some Practical Suggestions on Helping the Poor**

Consider the familiar case of the person who comes to your church asking for help with paying an electric bill. On the surface, it appears that this person's problem is ... a lack of material resources, and many churches respond by giving this person enough money to pay the electric bill. But what if this person's fundamental problem is not having the self-discipline to keep a stable job? Simply giving this person money is treating the symptoms rather than the underlying disease and will enable him to continue with his lack of self-discipline. In this case, the gift of the money does more harm than good, and it would be better not to do anything at all than to give this handout. Really! Instead, a better—and far more costly—solution would be for your church to develop a relationship with this person, a relationship that says, "We are here to walk with you and to help you use your gifts and abilities to avoid being in this situation in the future. Let us into your life and let us work with you to determine the reason you are in this predicament." (p. 53).

**When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert*

***Some Practical Suggestions on Helping the Poor**

- *Many of the people coming to your church for help will state that they are in a crisis, needing emergency financial help for utility bills, rent, food, or transportation. Is relief the appropriate intervention for such a person? Maybe, but maybe not. There are several things to consider:*
 - ***First, is there really a crisis at hand?*** *If you fail to provide immediate help, will there really be serious, negative consequences? If not, then relief is not the appropriate intervention, for there is time for the person to take actions on his own behalf.*
 - ***Second, to what degree was the individual personally responsible for the crisis?*** *Of course, compassion and understanding are in order here, especially when one remembers the systemic factors that can play a role in poverty. But it is still important to consider the person's own culpability in the situation, as allowing people to feel some of the pain resulting from any irresponsible behavior on their part can be part of the "tough love" needed to facilitate the reconciliation of poverty alleviation. The point is not to punish the person for any mistakes or sins he has committed but to ensure that the appropriate lessons are being learned in the situation.*

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 - ***Third, can the person help himself?*** *If so, then a pure handout is almost never appropriate, as it undermines the person's capacity to be a steward of his own resources and abilities.*
 - ***Fourth, to what extent has this person already been receiving relief from you or others in the past?*** *How likely is he to be receiving such help in the future? As special as your church is, it might not be the first stop on the train! This person may be obtaining "emergency" assistance from one church or organization after another, so that your "just-this-one-time gift" might be the tenth such gift the person has recently received. (pp. 101-102)*

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Questions?

