

[“How Are We to Give to the Poor?”](#)

I am working on a topic for a Men’s breakfast on “giving to the poor.” Do you have any articles on this specific topic? I am not looking at giving in general—i.e. to the local church or biblical ministries. My topic is specifically “giving personally to the poor.” Are we as believers commanded to share with the poor? Is that any difference between poor “believers” and poor “non-believers”? Do we give to the poor to help them or to grow in our own walk with the Lord?

Thank you for your questions and for writing Probe.org. I want to speed you on your way with some input, links and rhetorical questions of my own to get you thinking. We pray your teaching / challenge / presentation goes well.

Your question, and it’s understandable why you ask it, kind of sets up a false dichotomy that we’re all prone to these days. The notion that teaching on giving in general is somehow separate from teaching on giving as individuals seems like an American, 21st-century presumption. Why wouldn’t one inform the other? The church, after all, is made up of Christians, one by one. So teaching to the church at large is teaching to each believer—the doing (giving) just sometimes gets done through an organization.

I don’t know of any overtly direct commands on giving in the New Testament. However, as you can see below, there is much taught on the topic, which takes generous giving of several kinds for granted.

That should free you up to teach or lead discussions, if you buy into it. Pray and pick from all of the teachings to share. That’s why I’m including some of the links on giving in general, below. Here’s another good place to [start with Scriptures](#) and Bible study tools. Another set of Scriptures are [here](#).

What’s more, it may be that your church has a very institutionalized way of giving. It could have big, church-wide or denominational programs for giving to the poor, to missions and other things commanded by God. This is okay in and of itself, but has a way of taking the individual out of the mix. Wasn’t Jesus teaching disciples and followers rather than an institution? Too easy to cop out on our own responsibility or hide behind programs that way.

That’s why the other links are there, about our own personal heart attitude in giving. Kerby Anderson talks about this and other issues in [A Biblical Perspective on Giving](#) (especially the final two parts).

Also, what about people in our lives who need help, who need money in particular? Yesterday, a friend of mine was in serious need. First, I bought him lunch. I spent hours driving on miles on icy roads to get a huge amount of money to lend him. Today, I gave a bit of cash. I kept remembering the Scripture “But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?” (1 John 3:17). I am not like this—I always have better things to do and naturally wonder why people let things get so bad. The Spirit of God was leading me in God’s gracious way to see a fellow believer and human made in His image which is so different than my own fleshly way. It was the most fulfilling day I’ve spent in months, by the way.

Your query about whether Christians are different than unbelievers in this sense leads me to say, yes, when it comes to choices in general, I need to prioritize the brother and sister over the stranger. Ideally, I help all of them or lead them to help. But God’s Name and reputation is at stake,

according to John in his first epistle (1 John), when it comes to how we treat one another in the family of God. So again, fellow Christians are top priority—even while following after God’s heart for the poor and oppressed in general.

What do you do when confronted with a panhandler or needy relative or friend? Not an easy answer. I need to ask myself:

- IF I give, will I give gladly or grudgingly?
- How is God speaking to me these days about my own need to give?
- Am I giving already as a way of life or would it be just an impulse?
- Do I have anything to give the guy that will not put me or loved ones in great need or danger—where does wisdom come in to speak to me?
- Does he seem like he sincerely needs it or is he making a living on the street begging rather than working—is biblical discernment playing a role?
- Is it okay to ask that or do I feel guilty for even wondering?

Believers have to wrestle with deep issues of Lordship (is God really in charge of my own money and things?) and stewardship (how exactly should I use what I’ve been given?—and it’s ALL been given) and discernment (learning to know what’s bad, questionable, good, better, best) well ahead of time or we’re bobbing on the water when it comes to decisions in the moment.

Bottom line is: the heart of God is for the poor and oppressed. If I am seeking to love God and obey Him, to be like Him and reflect Him to others, I will care about the poor. If I honestly don’t care, I need to ask Him to put that into my heart and change me. I need to meditate on all those Scriptures that tell me He cares for the poor and needy and wants me to. Meanwhile, I need to give by faith and participate in the changing.

Giving can look like writing a check to the Red Cross or, often better, a biblically-oriented relief group like Samaritan’s Purse. Or it may be overtipping when witnessing to a waitstaff person. Or it could be just giving an (anonymous?) cash gift to someone who’s hurting financially or who needs something they can’t afford right now. It may be through the offering plate. Any way it’s given, it needs to be out of a heart given over to God fully. This article offers good perspective on it: [Developing a Giving Heart](#) at Bible.org (note: this is part of a series that looks very promising to me on a trusted Web site).

These links may help as well:

- [Giving Can Improve Your Health; Science Says So](#) (what’s wrong w/it being good for us?)
- [Charity and Compassion: Christianity Is Good for Culture](#) (I can do my part to change culture, not just the one I’m helping right now)
- [“What’s the NT Understanding of Tithing?”](#)

I hope this helps. Please let me know how it goes if you get a chance, will you?

Blessings,

Byron Barlowe

Posted Dec. 16, 2013
© 2013 Probe Ministries