

Benevolence:

– Church and Individual Action –

- Benevolence from the Church Treasury
- Individual Christian Benevolence
- Principles That Guide Benevolence

What Guides Our Benevolence?

In spiritual matters, we must begin with a single, guiding question:

- “What does the Bible authorize?”

This question becomes especially important when discussing benevolence.

Many well-meaning efforts today, confuse or conflate the roles of the church and the individual Christian, particularly regarding:

- Who may be helped,
- What funds may be used, and
- Where God’s authority draws the line.

As disciples of Christ, we are obligated to “do all in the name of the Lord” ([Col.3:17](#))—meaning by His authority. This includes how we handle charitable giving.

This lesson aims to clearly distinguish between:

- What the local church is authorized to do, and
- What the individual Christian is authorized and encouraged to do.
- We will also identify biblical principles that should guide how and when we give.

To begin, let’s first examine the pattern for,

I. Benevolence from the Church Treasury

Where does the Bible direct this aid?

Notice these,

A. Scriptural Examples

The Bible says,

- “...relief unto the **BRETHREN** which dwelt in Judaea.” ([Acts 11:27-30](#))
- “...collection for the **SAINTS**...” ([1Cor.16:2](#))
- “...to make a certain contribution for the poor **SAINTS** ...” ([Rom.15:25-26](#))
- “...fellowship of the ministering to the **SAINTS**.” ([2Cor.8:4](#))
- “...the ministering to the **SAINTS**...” ([2Cor.9:1](#))
- “all that **BELIEVED** were together, and had all things common;
⁴⁵ and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had **NEED**.”
([Acts 2:44–45](#); see also [Acts 4:32–35](#); [Acts 6:1–6](#))
- “If any man or woman that **BELIEVETH** have widows,
let them relieve them, and let **NOT** the church be charged;
that it may relieve them that are widows indeed.” ([1Tim.5:16](#))

In each case:

- The recipients are christians.
- The aid is organized, collected, and distributed by the local church.
- There is no example of using church funds to relieve unbelievers.

While the church is limited, the individual christian is given far more flexibility.

Let's examine what the Bible says about...

II. Individual Christian Benevolence

A. [Galatians 6:10](#) – Is The Foundational Authority for Helping All

...which reads,

- “As we have therefore opportunity, let us (individuals) do good, unto all men (unbelievers), especially unto them, who are of the household of faith (christians).”

Let's break down the key words and phrases to better understand Paul's meaning...

- The phrase “do good” (agathon) refers to both spiritual and material help.
- “All men” includes unbelievers.
- “Especially” shows priority, not exclusivity.
- The plural “let us” shows this is a command to individuals, not the church.

The Context confirms this includes material aid:

- Supporting teachers materially ([Gal.6:6](#)).
- Sowing to the Spirit implies investing in godly efforts, including giving ([Gal.6:7-8](#)).
- Encouragement to persevere in doing good to all ([Gal.6:9-10](#)).

Let's notice some,

B. Examples of Liberty to Help Unbelievers

Jesus commands doing good and lending even to enemies, not just believers.

- “But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great...” ([Lk.6:35](#))
- “If thine enemy hunger, feed him...” ([Rom.12:20](#))

The Good Samaritan gave material help to someone outside his group.

- Jesus said, “Go, and do thou likewise.” (read [Lk.10:33-37](#))

God views benevolence as a sacrifice that pleases Him.

- “But to do good and to communicate (or ready to share material blessings) forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.” ([Heb.13:16](#))
- “...do good (charity), ...rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate” ([1Tim.6:17-19](#))
Notice—there's no limitation here. Paul gives no restriction on who may receive this aid.

From [James 5:1-5](#), we learn that,

- The ungodly rich are condemned for hoarding, while christians are called to generosity.

From [Acts 20:35](#), we learn that,

- “It is more blessed to give, than to receive.”
...Which is said in the context of personal labor and sharing.

In Summary:

- Individual Christians are authorized—and even expected—to help any person in need, including unbelievers, with material support, as opportunity, ability and wisdom allow.

Now that we've established what is allowed, we must ask:
What should guide our giving?

Let's now examine some Biblical,

III. Principles That Guide Benevolence

Which includes...

A. Personal Responsibility

Notice gain, [1Tim.5:16](#), which reads...

- "If any man or woman that **BELIEVETH** have widows, let them relieve them, and let **NOT** the church be charged; that it may relieve them, that are widows indeed." ([1Tim.5:16](#))

The Principle Implied:

- There is a clear line between individual and church responsibilities.
- Individual Christians should relieve family of burdens so that the church may carry out its limited authorized role for "**widows indeed**".

Principles that guide benevolence of a Christian, includes...

B. Do Not Participate in Sin (Use Spiritual Discernment)

Benevolence must not enable, excuse, or partner with sinful lifestyles, as the Bible says,

- "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." ([Eph.5:11](#); [1Tim.5:22](#); [2Jn.1:10-11](#); [Rom.1:32](#); [1Cor.15:33](#); [2Thess.3:6,14](#))

The Principle Implied:

- Christians may give to unbelievers, but they must not enable sinful behavior.
- Our compassion should never lead us into partnership with sin.

Christians should...

C. Give With Purpose and Discretion

The Bible says,

- "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give..." ([2Cor.9:7](#))
- "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them..." (read [Matt.6:1-4](#))

The Principle Implied:

- Personal giving is an act of individual liberty and purpose, not for man's applause.
- Christians may give money or help, based on their own ability, wisdom, and conscience.

We are at liberty to exercise,

D. Ability-Based Generosity

The wisdom or proverbs says,

- "Withhold not good from them, to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand, to do it." ([Prov.3:27](#))

The Principle Implied:

- This wisdom aligns with the New Testament idea of individual opportunity and compassion.
- If you can help someone in need—and it is righteous to do so—you should (according to ability).

Christian benevolence is not random or reckless.

It is guided by principles of personal responsibility, spiritual purity, wisdom, and ability.

Even in generosity, we must not act blindly.

Christians should avoid giving in ways that encourage laziness, deceit, or dependence.

We should...

E. Use Wisdom and Discernment in Helping

[Proverbs 6:6-11](#), Encourages diligence and responsibility

—wisdom helps us discern between genuine need and enabling laziness.

- “...if any would not work, neither should he eat.” ([2Thess.3:10](#))

The Principle Implied:

- Benevolence is not meant to support idleness.
- Christians must use discernment to know when giving, truly helps or hurts.

IV. In-Summary

Church Benevolence (from Treasury)	Individual Christian Benevolence
Authorized only toward needy saints (Acts 11:29; 1Cor.16:1)	Authorized to all (Gal.6:10; Rom.12:20)
Governed by congregational oversight	Guided by personal liberty, love and wisdom
Cannot extend to unbelievers	May extend to unbelievers, enemies, neighbors
Regulated by Bible pattern	Regulated by conscience and opportunity
Must not participate in or support sin	Must not participate in or support sin

As followers of Christ, we must:

- Respect the boundaries placed on the church's collective action,
- Exercise our liberty as individual Christians to help the hurting,
- Do good to all, when opportunity arises, and
- Let our giving reflect God's love and holiness.

May we be a people of truth, compassion, and wisdom, honoring Christ in every good work we do.