

SCRIPTURE PRINCIPLES ABOUT GENEROSITY

Scripture has much to say about helping and giving to others. If we examine the various instructions and examples given, we can probably summarize them with the following principles:

1) Who should do it:

- It is primarily the duty of the *individual*, not the church or community.
- The individual is in the position of knowing if a family member or neighbor has a genuine need.
- Instances in which Scripture describes the *church* as being involved are mainly related to helping needy Christians in other localities (Romans 15:25-26), or (if it is a large group) helping Christians who would be outside an individual's circle of acquaintances (Acts 6:1-4).

2) Our motivation:

- Sharing must be done with the right motives and from the heart. It is to be done as an act of *love* for both God and people.
- It is not to be done as a bribe or enticement (in hope of getting something in return), or to impress other people. (Ananias and Sapphira learned this the hard way - see Acts chapter 5.)
- Hypocrisy is also condemned, as illustrated in Proverbs 23:6-7 (which warns about the person who pretends to be generous, but who is actually stingy at heart).

3) What should it accomplish?

- Generosity was never intended to be a "get rich quick" scheme for the poor. It involved helping others with their basic needs, not promoting a luxurious lifestyle.

4) The need for accountability.

- "Blind handouts" are never encouraged. Carelessly giving out money is an expression of *folly*, not of God-honoring *wisdom*. (Besides, it is *God's* money that you're using. Or misusing.)
- It is sin to enable another person to indulge in sinful behavior. For instance, Scripture tells us to *not* to give food to the lazy (2 Thessalonians 3:10), or provide lodging for false teachers (acting like traveling evangelists, needing a place to stay, 2 John 1:10-11). Nor

should we allow our generosity to be a means of enabling any other type of sin, such as drunkenness, etc.

- When we use God's resources to enable someone to sin, *we share in that person's guilt*.

5) Who should receive it?

- Specific obligations to share belong to specific people. Generosity begins with the needs of one's own family (physical family and/or Christian family).
- This does not mean that we totally ignore the needs of other people. But our primary responsibility is to care for our own family - and we are not to pass that obligation off to someone else.

6) What about helping unsaved people?

- Scripture does not tell us that we should *never* help unsaved people (if they qualify, etc.). After all, helping one's physical family may include helping unsaved people.
- We need to remember the priorities Scripture gives us. We are not to neglect our *first* obligation - caring for the needs of family (physical and/or spiritual)!
- Scripture tells us that our *primary* obligation toward the unsaved is to share God's Word with them. If we refuse to do this, we have refused their *greatest* need; and any other help will not be pleasing to God. (It would be helping them the way an *unsaved* person does it.)

7) About the receiver (obligations and qualifications):

- Scripture presents a variety of instructions and examples which teach us when to give and when not to give to someone. Under the section about "accountability," we saw some instances in which giving should *not* be done.
- Even when a person qualifies, there may be times when the *receiver* needs to exert some effort in obtaining what is being given, rather than lazily sitting back and waiting for it to come. In the Old Testament, for instance, grain was left in the fields for the poor (Leviticus 23:22); *but the poor had to be willing to go out and get it!*
- It must be remembered that a generous spirit is a moral obligation for *all* people. A poor or needy person may be unable to be generous in some ways, but there are *many* ways to display a spirit of generosity and love. If they *claim* to be saved, encourage them to *live* it!

8) What about "forced generosity"?

- Helping that is done out of coercion is *not* an expression of generosity! However, a generous spirit can be displayed by going *above and beyond* the "bare minimum" that is

being required. (This principle is the basis for the expression, "going the extra mile" - Matthew 5:41.)

9) Qualifications of the giver.

- God-honoring generosity is only possible for a follower of Jesus, because it begins with a desire to honor *God*. Scripture reminds us that we must do *all* to the glory of God, not just *some* things (1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17)!
- An unsaved person *cannot* give or be generous in a way that honors God, because he excludes God from his actions. His "goodness" is counterfeit, and bears only a superficial resemblance to what God accepts as genuine - even though people may temporarily benefit from it.
- Some "humanitarian" organizations controlled by unsaved people welcome participation by Christians, *as long as the Christians are willing to exclude God from what they do*. For a follower of Jesus, omitting God is *not* an option!

10) To *maximize* the value of our generosity.

- The world may offer gimmicks and incentives to encourage acts of generosity. We do not need this, because *God* has already given us the greatest possible incentive: *love*.
- If we want to maximize the value of our giving, it's very simple! All we need to do is to *first* give (or "re-give") ourselves to *God*, before we give ourselves (our time, our possessions) to *people*. We can follow the praiseworthy example of the Macedonians, mentioned by Paul, in 2 Corinthians 8:1-4.