

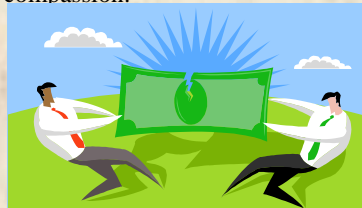
Forced Christian Charity: Government and Welfare (cont.)

compelled government handouts to the poor using other people's money is not.

It is easy to claim to be compassionate when using other people's money. It is interesting that those who claim to be the most compassionate and support government programs for the poor are the least "charitable" with their own money. Many of us may recall one notable example from 1997 when Vice President Al Gore and wife Tipper reported adjusted gross income of \$197,000, yet gave only \$353 to charity.

In his 2006 book, "Who Really Cares," Arthur Brooks, found that households headed by conservatives gave 30% more on average to charity than households headed by liberals. Brooks found that religiously active conservatives who raise traditional families are the most generous in every measurable area. These conservatives, who do not accept the belief that forced government spending is a form of charity, ensure that they give more of their own money to such causes.

That study was consistent with a study conducted by Google that found an even greater disparity: average annual contributions by conservatives were almost double those of liberals. Thus it is easier to be "charitable" when it comes to giving other people's money away through government programs, yet when it comes to true charity using your own money, there wasn't as much compassion.



The widespread belief that government programs to assist the needy are compatible with Christian principles is in error. According to Dr. Thomas L. Johnson, former university economics professor, "government welfare is the antithesis of Christian charity. Government welfare operates on the premise of force, whereas Christian charity can only exist where there is

freedom of choice — where there is an act of the individual will."

Government is not capable of showing love or compassion; only people are. Likewise, we cannot use the coercive force of the tax code to absolve ourselves of our moral responsibility toward the needy by getting someone other than ourselves to pay for it. That is not compassion; that is a "cop out."

Government Charity is Not Biblical

There is not a single Biblical example teaching that government should be involved in charity. In an excellent thesis on this matter ("Christian Charity and the Welfare State," The Dakota Beacon, April 14, 2011), Dr. Mark Hendrickson notes that Christ uses internal compulsion (conscience) while government uses external compulsion (physical force); methods that are diametrically opposed. Dr. Hendrickson asks this important question: "Where in the Bible is the church of Christ instructed to delegate its charitable mission to civil government, or to seek a 'joint custody,' or shared responsibility, for Christian beneficence? Christians may 'reprove, rebuke, exhort' (II Tim. 4:2) others to increase their charitable activities, but where in the Bible is it written that we may compel others to act charitably?"

Supporters of government charity sometimes cite to the passage in Mark 10:21 where Jesus confronts the rich man who asks how to obtain eternal life in God's kingdom. Jesus responded by telling him to; "... go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: . . ."

This scripture provides no basis for government charity or government redistribution of wealth. Jesus merely tells the rich man what the consequences will be if the rich man sells what he has and gives it to the poor based on His awareness of this particular man's issue with money. Had the man been struggling with lust, Jesus may have told him to stop committing adulterous affairs,

return to his wife and then he would have treasure in heaven. The critical point here though is that Jesus did not forcefully impose His will over this man. The man was free to choose his own course of action and indeed, the man chose not to give to the poor and he was free to leave. Jesus allowed the man to depart in peace. Had government charity been involved, the man's refusal would have been met by IRS ire, then fines and possibly even imprisonment.

Mark Hendrickson makes the further clarification about Christians who claim that communism is compatible with Christianity by citing to Acts 4:32-37 and 5:1-10 where the Christians share a common purse after Jesus' ascension. "There is a crucial difference," Hendrickson notes, "between the apostles' arrangement and communism, which the Christian socialists overlook. The apostles practiced communalism, not communism. Communalism is entirely consensual. It includes only those members of the larger community who voluntarily decide to participate. The apostles' communalism was radically different from socialism, fascism, or the democratic welfare state, in which membership is not optional, but compulsory, and everyone living within that political jurisdiction must pay into the common treasury."

Nor is the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-35 supportive of a government role in charity. The Samaritan who assisted the man in need did so voluntarily using his own money. Nowhere in that parable was government involved or encouraged to be involved.

Finally, we should note the response by Jesus in Luke 12:14 after a man asked that Jesus tell the man's brother to share his inheritance with him. In refusing the request, Jesus replied: "... who made me judge or a divider over you?" In this account, Jesus has the chance to encourage wealth redistribution schemes yet he not

"No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the Invisible Hand which conducts the affairs of men more than the people of the United States. Every step by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency." –

President George Washington, Inaugural Speech to Congress, April 30, 1789.

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only declines to do so, noting He is not justified to make such a determination, he further admonishes them about being covetous. If Jesus is not willing to order the involuntary redistribution of one person's property to another, then upon what moral authority does government seek to do so today?

Those in need invariably require more than a government handout. They invariably will have mental and spiritual needs that are at the root of, or in addition to, their physical needs. Private charity engaged in

voluntarily and motivated by love can minister to the entire spectrum of a person's needs and the causes of those needs to permanently transform a person. Compelled government charity, that only addresses the surface monetary problem and that uses other people's money to do it, cannot.

With God, the goal is not just to meet a person's physical needs, it is ultimately to lead them to Christ where their entire life can be restored. A bureaucratic hand out is a poor substitute for what God intended.

It is time to end the nonsense

that government charity is compassionate. We are all individually responsible for our own Christian charity. We are not called to push off our responsibilities to "the rich" or to "society," and we are certainly not called to force others to give their money so we can pat ourselves on the back and feel that we have done our job toward the needy. The Bible makes clear that compelling others to do good deeds is not what pleases God. As Dr. Johnson so astutely noted, forced compassion is the antithesis of charity.

"The good (in the United States) would never have come into being without the blessing and power of Jesus Christ . . . Whoever tries to conceive the [word] American without taking full account of the suffering and love and salvation of Christ is only dreaming."—

Charles Habib Malik, former Ambassador to the United Nations from Lebanon and President of the United Nations General Assembly in 1959.