

Church Benevolence

What Is the Biblical Work of the Church?

CHURCH BENEVOLENCE

CARING FOR GOD'S FAMILY

Benevolence is the loving responsibility Christians have to care for those in need—especially fellow believers. It is not optional. It is an expression of our faith in Jesus Christ and our gratitude for His grace.

1. BIBLICAL PURPOSE

The church exists not only to worship God and teach His word, but also to care for those in need. Scripture teaches that believers are to share with one another, especially within the family of faith.

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need."

— Acts 2:42-45

2. FOR WHOM IS IT INTENDED?

Church benevolence is for members of the Lord's church who are in need.

"If a man or woman believer has no relatives to help them, and especially if they have no one in the family of believers to help them, let the church see that they are not burdened."

— 1 Timothy 5:16 (NIV)

The Bible does not teach that the church supports institutions, denominations, or works outside the scope of caring for fellow believers.

3. OUR EXAMPLE: THE EARLY CHURCH

The early church took care of their own.

"There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."

— Acts 4:34-35

4. SUPPORTED BY WILLING GIFTS

Benevolence is supported by cheerful, willing contributions—not by coercion or obligation.

"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

— 2 Corinthians 9:7

5. MANAGED BY THE LOCAL CHURCH

The local congregation is responsible for identifying needs, distributing help, and ensuring that benevolence is used according to God's will.

"The elders who direct the affairs of the church will be worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching."

— 1 Timothy 5:17

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- We care for our own (Galatians 6:10).
- We do it with love (1 John 3:17-18).
- We do it cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:6-7).
- We do it faithfully (Proverbs 19:17).
- We do it for God's glory (Matthew 6:2-4).

Benevolence reflects the heart of Christ. When we care for one another, we show the world that we are His disciples.

"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

— John 13:35

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LOVE

We care for one another.

1 JOHN 3:17



SUPPORT

We help those in need among God's family.

1 TIMOTHY 5:16



UNITY

We share so that no one has lack.

ACTS 4:34



GLORY TO GOD

We give cheerfully for His glory.

2 CORINTHIANS 9:7

"Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his deed."

PROVERBS 19:17

Introduction

The Bible repeatedly teaches that God's people are to be generous, compassionate, and eager to help those in need. From the earliest days of the church, Christians shared with one another so that no faithful brother or sister lacked life's necessities. Yet Scripture also establishes principles governing how the local church carries out its work of benevolence.

In an age when churches are often asked to support a wide variety of charitable organizations, social programs, and humanitarian causes, it is important to ask one question:

What has God authorized the local church to do?

Our goal is not to minimize compassion, but to ensure that our compassion is guided by the will of God.

God Cares for Those in Need

The Lord has always demonstrated concern for the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger.

The Law of Moses contained numerous provisions to care for the needy (Deuteronomy 15:7–11). The prophets condemned those who ignored the poor (Isaiah 1:17; Amos 5:11–12), and Jesus Himself showed compassion to those who suffered (Matthew 9:36).

Christians are therefore called to reflect the character of God by showing mercy and generosity.

Individual Christians Have a Broad Responsibility

Every Christian has a personal responsibility to help others whenever possible.

Paul wrote:

"So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith." (Galatians 6:10)

Notice two important truths:

- Christians are to do good **to everyone**.
- Fellow Christians receive special consideration.

Individual believers may support food banks, disaster relief, neighbors in need, medical assistance, community charities, or other worthy causes according to their ability and judgment.

This is the personal responsibility of every disciple.

The Local Church Has a Specific Mission

While individual Christians may help anyone, the New Testament shows that the **local church** has a more defined work.

The church was established to:

- preach the gospel (1 Timothy 3:15; Philippians 4:15–16),
- edify the saints (Ephesians 4:11–16),
- and provide benevolent relief according to the pattern revealed in Scripture.

The church must never assume responsibilities that God has assigned to individuals, families, or civil government.

Respecting these distinctions preserves the mission Christ gave His church.

Benevolence in the Early Church

The first Christians demonstrated remarkable generosity.

Acts 2:44–45 says:

"And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need."

Likewise, Acts 4:34–35 records:

"There was not a needy person among them..."

The needy were believers within the church, and the funds were distributed by the apostles according to genuine need.

This passage reveals both compassion and orderly oversight.

Relief for Needy Saints

Several passages specifically describe churches sending financial assistance to fellow Christians.

During a famine, disciples sent relief to brethren living in Judea.

Acts 11:29–30 says:

"The disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea."

Paul later organized a collection among Gentile congregations for needy Christians in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25–27; 1 Corinthians 16:1–2; 2 Corinthians 8–9).

In every example, churches sent relief to needy saints.

The New Testament never records churches financing general social welfare programs or maintaining charitable institutions as part of their collective work.

Families Must Accept Their Responsibility

One of the clearest passages on benevolence is found in 1 Timothy 5.

Paul teaches that children and grandchildren are responsible for caring for their widowed relatives.

"If anyone does not provide for his relatives... he has denied the faith." (1 Timothy 5:8)

He further instructed:

"If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who