

Almsgiving

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from multiple sources)

Introduction:

- A. Luke 12:32-33; Acts 10:1-4
- B. "Alms? What are alms? Is that sort of like footwashing? You know... old Bible stuff nobody does anymore?"
- C. Quickly, tell me about almsgiving among Christians today; how do we do it?
 - 1. "Giving on Sunday?" No
 - 2. "Is it paying my taxes, and the government takes care of the poor?" No
 - 3. "Giving to a charity?" No
 - 4. Not talking about larger benevolent works to which one contributes on an individual basis
 - 5. Even when one is known for generosity, the apostolic and inspired instruction to the Thessalonians is essential - 1Thes. 4:9-10
- E. All New Testament practices have some application or instruction for contemporary Christians
 - 1. What are alms?
 - 2. How do I practice almsgiving in the 21st century?

I. BACKGROUND OF ALMS

- A. The English word "alms" is an abridged form of the Greek word, eleemosune
 - 1. The Jews viewed almsgiving as one of the great works of righteousness Deut. 15:11
 - 2. Older manuscripts use the Greek word dikaiosunen, translated as "righteousness"
 - 3. According to Rabbi Assi, "Almsgiving is a powerful paraclete between the Israelites and their Father in heaven, it brings the time of redemption nigh (Talmud 10a).
- B. Definition: Alms or almsgiving involves giving to others as an act of virtue, either materially or in the sense of providing capabilities for free. It exists in a number of religions and regions of the world.
 - 1. The word, in the modern English language, comes from the Old English ælmesse, ælmes, from Late Latin eleemosyna, from Greek ἐλεημοσύνη eleēmosynē "pity, alms", from ἐλεήμων eleēmōn "merciful", from ἔλεος eleos "pity."
 - 2. In Judaism, tzedakah, a Hebrew term literally meaning righteousness but commonly used to signify charity, refers to the religious obligation to do what is right and just.
 - 3. Tzedakah is regarded as a form of the Law of Moses "maaserani," or poor-tithe, as well as Biblical practices including permitting the poor to glean the corners of a field, harvest during the Sabbatical year, and other practices.
 - 4. Tzedakah, along with prayer and repentance with fasting, is regarded by the Jews as easing the consequences of unrighteous deeds.

II. WHAT ARE ALMS?

- A. It's not about the money, the amount or the duration of its use
 - 1. Because we tend to think a bit materially, we are inclined to think of giving in terms of money
 - 2. In the Old Testament, giving was regulated by the tithe, but its entire purpose was about glorifying God - Psalm 96:7-8
 - 3. In the New Testament, giving is about many things, but instructions about the amount are conspicuous by their absence. Instead, giving in the context of alms and benevolence is about
 - a. Fellowship, manifested by sharing
 - b. Love for others, manifested by giving
 - c. Glorifying God, manifested by the seed principle
 - d. Spreading the gospel, manifested by God's grace in enabling them to give - 2Cor. 8:1-6, 9:8-14
- B. It's not about me
 - 1. Jesus took the Jewish standard of alms and raised it higher
 - a. Matt. 5:20, 6:1 - Three examples of this:
 - 1) Almsgiving - Matt. 6:2-4
 - 2) Prayer - Matt. 6:5-15
 - 3) Fasting - Matt. 6:16-18
 - b. Do these things individually and as quietly as possible
 - 2. Almsgiving is about stewardship
 - a. Matt. 25:14 - Parable of the stewards is about stewardship, not about amounts of revenue generated, could have been toads
 - b. The talents didn't belong to them; they were given them to use on the master's behalf
 - c. "I was afraid!" "No, you were wicked and lazy."
 - d. God didn't give you what you have for you; He gave it to you for you to distribute it on His behalf
 - e. "Here Lord, I took good care of the house you gave me, and the cars, etc." "Was it hot when you took care of those things? Not as hot as it's gonna be!" "But Lord, I built bigger barns to store what you gave me!" "You can't take it with you because it will burn up."
 - f. You don't even own your body - 1Cor. 6:19-20
 - 3. Do we understand, yet? - 1Chron. 29:11-12, 29:14; Luke 6:38
- C. It's about God
 - 1. It is not, "Here, I am giving you this."
 - 2. It is, "Here, God sent me to give this to you."
 - 3. To understand alms, we must understand:
 - a. It all belongs to God
 - b. It was not given to me for my exclusive comfort, but I hold it as a servant and a steward
 - c. It is not about something as limited and small as money, but demands a commitment of our entire being

4. No wonder the rabbis believed almsgiving was one of the three great righteousnesses, and no wonder Jesus said that our righteousness must exceed that of the Jews
5. What things constitute alms?
 - a. Money is just one of many things.
 - b. Time, work, attention, energy, resources, moving out of your comfort zone, taking a loss for someone else's gain, just as Jesus did for us
 - c. Alms are good deeds done in behalf of God to others at our own expense from what God has given us.
- D. Do you understand why Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive?
 1. Alms encourage unselfishness within us.
 2. Alms brings others needed relief and encouragement.
 3. Alms force us out of our own narrow world.
 4. Alms keep us from becoming too attached to material things.
 5. Alms model the life Christ lived.
 6. Alms result in eternal rewards.
 7. Alms teach us the value of servanthood.
 8. Alms make us more cheerful, caring people.
 9. Alms prompt greater sensitivity toward others.
 10. Alms provide an example for others to follow.

III. MOTIVES FOR ALMSGIVING

- A. Jewish scholar Maimonides created a list of increasingly spiritual motives for almsgiving:
 1. Giving begrudgingly
 2. Giving less than one should, but giving it cheerfully.
 3. Giving after being asked.
 4. Giving before being asked.
 5. Giving when one does not know the recipient's identity, but the recipient knows the giver's identity.
 6. Giving when one knows the recipient's identity, but the recipient doesn't know the giver's identity.
 7. Giving when neither party knows the other's identity.
 8. Helping the recipient to become self-reliant and capable of offering charity of his own.
- B. The motives behind giving play an important role in becoming more spiritual.
 1. One gives with annoyance, or as a way of offending the recipient, or with the idea of insulting or humbling him.
 2. One gives out of fear of what might happen if he fails to make an offering.
 3. One gives in return for a favor done to him in the past.
 4. One gives with the hope of getting a similar favor for in the future.
 5. One gives because giving is considered good.
 6. One gives to obtain a good reputation.
 7. One gives to become a better person.

8. One gives from entirely altruistic motives, because giving is good and beautiful.
- C. Even voluntary works of righteousness must be done from a pure heart and according to the word of God
1. Alms as a means of self-aggrandizement - Matt. 6:1
 2. The outward versus the inward giving of alms - Luke 11:41
 3. Alms of the rich versus the poor - Luke 21:1-4
 4. Giving alms out of love and not out of duty - Matt. 25:45
 5. Almsgiving is about giving one's self to God and then to others by His will - 2Cor. 8:5