

Some Thoughts on Charity

As most of us are probably aware, Scripture exhorts us to be charitable to our neighbors - especially with regard to providing food for the needy. Both the Old and New Testaments are explicit about that fact. For example:

Leviticus 23:22 (ESV)

²²“And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God.”

Proverbs 22:9 (NIV)

⁹ A generous man will himself be blessed,
for he shares his food with the poor.

Matthew 25:34-36 (ESV):

³⁴Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’

James 2:15-16 (ESV):

¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

However, the apostle Paul also provides some very explicit instructions about people who should **not** receive charity:

2 Thessalonians 3:6-11 (NIV):

⁶In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. ⁷For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, ⁸nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. ⁹We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. ¹⁰For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: **“If a man will not work, he shall not eat.”**

So, it appears that we are strongly exhorted to provide food to the sincerely needy. However, it also appears that if a person has the *ability* to work, but simply *chooses* not to, then we should *not* provide food to that individual.

The primary reason why I am concerned about this topic is because I work in downtown San Francisco; and as a result, I frequently encounter people who claim to be hungry. In other words, I encounter many, *many* individuals who solicit money from others, because they assert that they cannot afford to purchase food for themselves.

Of course, I do not have any way of determining any given individual's situation. Presumably, some percentage of those individuals are actually in dire straits - and therefore, they are legitimately hungry. Equally presumably, though, another percentage of those individuals *choose* not to work - and even worse, simply want money in order to buy drugs or alcohol.

There are two other items to note about this overall situation. First, almost all of the individuals soliciting money are adult men, between about 30 and 60 years old, who have no obvious disabilities. Second, the state of California has an *extremely* generous food stamp program.

As a result, I am faced with a very difficult dilemma when an individual claims that he is hungry - and therefore, asks me for money. On one hand, I certainly want to be generous to the truly needy - since Scripture is full of exhortations to do just that. On the other hand, though, I definitely do not want to give money to people who are intentionally idle - particularly if they are likely to buy drugs with that money (and potentially overdose.)

The conclusion that I have come up with, to try to solve this issue, is to *empower* individuals to help themselves. Basically, I found a web site which contains information about food banks, and other free food distribution centers (such as churches), in San Francisco. All of the various food distribution centers are listed on a chart, on one double-sided sheet of paper.

As a result, I carry copies of that chart with me - so that whenever I encounter an adult man who claims to be hungry, I can give him a copy of that chart. (If the individual in question is not an adult man, then the situation is completely different.)

Here is a link to the web page, which contains the "San Francisco Free Eats" chart:

[San Francisco Free Eats Chart](#)

So far, this solution has appeared to work out relatively well.

I would certainly be interested to hear what the rest of you think about this topic!