

Spirit, *“If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat”* (2 Thessalonians 3:10). He explained further: *“Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need”* (Ephesians 4:28).

Obviously, from these passages, and numerous others that could be given, God expects every person to be both industrious for himself and selfless toward those who are in need. This is the compassion of Christianity, not the socialist idea of taking from everybody so that some centralized power can disperse at will to those who have been made beggars by the system.

God’s command to His people is to *“... Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”* (Mark 16:15). Why did He not command us to go into all the world and give to the poor? Jesus, Himself, stated, *“... For you have the poor with you always...”* (Matthew 26:11). If Christians gave everything they had to help the needy, it would not solve the world’s problems, and all of **the resources of the church would be consumed in benevolent work, with nothing left for the preaching of the Gospel to the saving of souls.**

Man may be short-sighted, thinking that physical help is what is most important. But

humans forget that God is part of the equation: As was promised by Jesus, *“Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you”* (Luke 6:38).

As individual Christians give to God, He will bless them even physically as a result. As individual congregations engage in God’s work of evangelizing their own communities, they are instructed: *“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith”* (Galatians 6:10). It is the responsibility of local congregations to respond, as they are able, to the suffering of those around them. God, as a result, will bless those individuals and congregations, both spiritually and physically, *“...good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over...”*

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# **The Compassion of Christianity**

**J.C. Choate**



# The Compassion of Christianity

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There is much in the Bible about mercy toward the needy. In Judaism, God said, *“When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless all the work of your hands.”*

Mercy and compassion are also taught in the New Testament. Christians are commanded to *“... visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world”* (James 1:27). James explained even further, *“If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead’* (James 2:15-17).

Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, instructed in Galatians 6:2: *“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”* Jesus, Himself, gave the classic example of the compassionate neighbor in the story of the traveler who fell among thieves and was robbed, beaten,

and left destitute (Luke 10:25-37). Two hypocritical religious leaders saw the man and passed by on the other side of the road, ignoring his plight. Then a stranger, not even of the victim’s own nationality, stopped, treated his wounds, sat him on his donkey, and took him to an inn where he made provisions for the continued care of the man. Jesus praised the “good Samaritan” as being the real neighbor.

Often Christianity is portrayed as being socialistic in nature because of the account in Acts 2:44,45: *“Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need”*

While this passage is used as an example of Christianity in action, it does not portray the complete picture. Yes, people sold their possessions and shared with those in need. Why were some in such dire straits? Some who read this part of the account would not be aware that the church at this beginning point of its existence was made up of many who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish feasts of Passover and Pentecost. Acts 2:9-11 says that the multitude was made up of *visitors from sixteen parts of the world!* These people had come from great distances, at great expense, for an expected short period of time.

After their conversion, however, they stayed on in Jerusalem to learn more about the Christ, His kingdom, and their new life, from the teachings of the Apostles. As their funds ran out, Christians from the area began to sell their own possessions so that the needs of all could be met.

Later, in Acts 11:28-30, a great famine was prophesied, and Christians in Antioch decided to send relief to the brethren in Judea, *“each according to his ability.”*

Think with me: if it had been the continued practice, since the church began numerous years earlier, for all Christians everywhere to sell all of their possessions and to divide them among the other Christians of the area, the folks in Antioch would not have had any possessions to share (each according to his ability) with the destitute Christians in Judea.

Obviously, the situation in Jerusalem had been the exception to the norm. Everyone selling his possessions, and all Christians in an area sharing what they had, was a description only of an emergency situation. In normal circumstances, when there was a need, Christians made voluntary contributions *“according to his ability.”*

Does God want people to selflessly support one another financially, when there is no crisis? Paul commanded, by direction of the Holy