

# Is A Gift from the Church Treasury “Benevolence” Just Because Someone Says It Is?

## INTRODUCTION

1. Some of my Ghanaian brethren said that some Ghana churches of Christ do not pay for weddings and funerals. Instead, what they do is “give a gift” to the family involved.
2. I believe I understand the distinction that they are trying to make. It is this: by giving money to the family, then the church is not actually paying the bills for the wedding or funeral.
3. Instead, the church gives a gift to the family and calls it benevolence. But a family wanting to pay for a wedding or funeral is not in true need as defined in the Bible. Keep this in mind.
4. Regardless of what the gift is called, there is no authority for it in the Bible. It is not true benevolence according to what is shown in scripture.

## A. What Benevolence Is And Is Not

1. Benevolence as defined by God is a gift given to relieve critical life needs.
2. True life needs would be food, shelter, clothing, and the like.  
Note the presence of “**need**” in the following passages: Acts 2:45, Acts 4:35, Ephesians 4:28.  
Note the presence of poverty and life-threatening conditions in: Acts 11:28, Romans 15:25-26, Luke 14:13, Luke 19:8, 2 Cor. 11:9, Galatians 2:10.
3. On the one hand, failure to show generosity and render aid to relieve true needs when you can do so is sin:
  - a. Proverbs 3:27-28, 1 John 3:17
  - b. 1 Timothy 5:8
  - c. James 2:15-16
  - d. Matthew 19:21, Mark 10:21
4. On the other hand, paying for something from the church treasury that is not a true Biblical need is not benevolence as authorized by scripture.

## B. Benevolence Commands & Examples in the Bible (Review)

1. By the authority of approved examples in scripture, churches may use money from their treasuries only to meet true scriptural needs.
  - a. The money is to be given only to members of their own congregations, and in some cases to assist other congregations in need. No other examples.
  - b. Members of a specific assembly helping each other: Acts 2:44-45, Acts 4:32-35, Acts 6:1-3.
  - c. Members of one assembly helping another in need: Acts 11:28-30, Romans 15:25-27, 1 Cor. 16:1-2, 2 Cor. 8 and 9.
  - d. Note the use of the words “saints” (Romans 15:25-26, 1 Cor. 16:1, 2 Cor. 8:4) and “believed” (Acts 4:32) and “disciples” (Acts 6:1-2) and “brethren” (Acts 11:29) to refer to those being helped by the money from the church treasuries.
  - e. These words show beyond any doubt that only Christians were the ones receiving benevolent aid from the church treasuries.
2. Individual Christians are not limited in this way. Since the purpose of this study is to understand matters of benevolence authorized in scripture for churches, we will not look at passages relating to individual Christians here.
3. The following things are also commanded regarding benevolence in the Holy Bible:
  - a. Someone who can work and will not, should not be given anything: 2 Thessalonians 3:10
  - b. Family members are to provide for the needy in their families first: 1 Timothy 5:16

## C. Examples of Sinful Traditions and Practices Condemned by God in the Bible

1. **Benefactors** – a word with a good meaning used by Gentiles to describe leaders who exercise lordship and control: Luke 22:24-27. Jesus is saying that even though they describe themselves by the word “benefactor” does not make them so.

2. **Corban** – Matthew 15:5, Mark 7:9-12. Jewish people had a responsibility under the law of Moses (Exodus 20:5, Deuteronomy 5:16) to honor their parents. Failure to obey this responsibility was the same as cursing one's parents (Matthew 15:4 and Exodus 21:17)
  - a. There were many ways to honor one's parents, and one of them was by caring for their them if they were in need.
  - b. The word "corban" meant "dedicated to God."
  - c. So the Jews made an unauthorized exception to the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment by allowing anyone to say that their goods that they should use to help their parents was "corban."
  - d. Then they were excused from obeying the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment! They were not put to death!
  - e. Even worse, the person who said "corban" was not even required to give their goods to God. He or she was allowed to keep their goods and not give them to God. Hypocrisy!
3. **"Many other things"** – Mark 7:13. Jesus said that Jews committed a lot of other similar sins that replace the commands of God with their traditions. He does not list them all here. His example of the abuse of Corban is sufficient to illustrate His point.

#### **D. Using Another Name for Sin Does Not Remove the Sin. It Is Still Sin.**

1. In American English, adultery is often called "cheating," or "fooling around," or "hanky panky," or "having an affair." These words and phrases do not sound as harsh as *adultery*. But it is adultery, and adultery is sin regardless of what someone may call it.
2. The same is true for any other sin, such as stealing from the company bank account. Some call that "borrowing" but it is not that at all.
3. Likewise, lying is sometimes called "bending the truth," or "misrepresentation," or a "factual mistake." If what was said was a lie, then it is sin. Calling sin by another name does not change it into something acceptable.
4. The same is true regarding benevolence. If I want to do something not authorized by the Bible, renaming it as something that sounds authorized does not justify it or excuse it.

#### **E. CONCLUSION**

1. Tradition does not change or remove the commands of God.
2. Calling sin by a different name does not make the sin acceptable to God.
3. We must obey all of God's commands and examples, and not look for excuses by renaming the sins.

**Mark 7:1** Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem.

2 Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault.

3 For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders.

4 When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches.

5 Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?"

6 He answered and said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.

7 And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'

8 "For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men--the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do."

9 He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.

10 "For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.'

11 "But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban"-' (that is, a gift to God),

12 "then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother,

13 "making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do."