



[1 Thessalonians 4:10-12](#)

(10) And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more; (11) And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; (12) That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.

[Proverbs 12:24](#)

(24) The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute.

[2 Thessalonians 3:10](#)

(10) For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.

[1 Timothy 5:8](#)

(8) But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

King James Version

It is beyond question that Christians should be compassionate. We are to give to the poor and aid the needy ([Matthew 19:21](#); [Luke 14:13](#); [Galatians 2:10](#); etc.). We are to lend a helping hand to those who have stumbled and bear the burdens of the weak ([Acts 20:35](#); [Galatians 6:2](#); [James 1:27](#); etc.). It is [sin](#)

to us if we know to do good and fail to do it ([James 4:17](#); [Proverbs 3:27-28](#)).
But how far does this go?

A certain tension exists in God's Word on this point. On the one hand, [God](#) indeed commands us to give, help, aid, comfort, and support others in their need. He even set up the third-tithe system to care for those truly in need. However, He is also a proponent of personal responsibility.

Where should charity end and personal responsibility begin?

Even in the land of self-reliance and rugged individualism, we live in a partial welfare state. Government and private handouts are common and relatively easy to get. Citizens can be propped up for long periods if they fit a certain category of need, such as being jobless, a single parent, handicapped, and the like. The nation provides "cushions" of all sorts to soften a person's landing when he falls. Other, more socialist nations are far ahead of the U.S. in this regard.

This has a short-term appeal, but it is regressive and spiritually dangerous over the long haul. Even though they feel a kind of shame for being on the dole, long-term welfare recipients develop an attitude of entitlement called the "welfare mentality." In time, they feel that they deserve help from others and become offended if they do not receive it. They also take [offense](#) if someone suggests that they should be looking for work or learning a new skill or weaning themselves off public/private assistance. Why should they? They are getting something for nothing!

The danger appears when this attitude begins to bleed over into a Christian's relationship with God. Sure, God's grace is freely given ([Romans 3:24](#); [5:15](#)), but does that mean He requires nothing of us in return? True Christianity is not "give your heart to the Lord, and you shall be saved!" True Christianity is "[Repent](#), and believe in [the gospel](#)" ([Mark 1:15](#))!

[Jesus](#) packs so much into these few words! This "gospel in a nutshell" expands to include conscious effort to change and grow in the grace, knowledge, and character of God every waking moment of our day. Christianity is not a lazy-person's religion. It is a God-centered way of living that demands our constant attention so that we can "put on the new man" (

[Ephesians 4:17-32](#); [Colossians 3:1-17](#)) and "shine as lights in [the world](#)" ([Philippians 2:15](#)).

A welfare mentality—"the way of get"—is the antithesis of God's way of give, of outgoing concern, of esteeming others better than oneself. It can manifest itself in many forms of behavior: failure to recognize God-given blessings and opportunities to prosper, laziness, sponging off others, rarely helping or entertaining others, making excuses for one's financial state, expressing contempt for "menial" jobs when unemployed, having unrealistically high standards or expectations, etc. All these assume that we deserve something.

To put it bluntly, rather than others owing us something, the only thing we truly deserve is death ([Romans 3:10-20](#), 23; 6:23)! If we are Christians, however, we have been forgiven and set on the right path toward God's Kingdom ([Ephesians 2:1-10](#)). To us, God gives the promise that we need not worry about our life, food, or clothing ([Luke 12:22-34](#)). God will take care of us! David says, "I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread" ([Psalm 37:25](#)). Leave those worries behind! Receive with gladness and gratitude what God gives. Then we can concentrate our efforts on seeking His Kingdom and His righteousness, and part of that is ridding ourselves of the despicable and satanic notion that we deserve a free ride. Therefore, "*work* out your own salvation in fear and trembling" ([Philippians 2:12](#))!

— Richard T. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

[Welfare and Christianity](#)

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