

How important is it to give to Christian missions versus secular charities?
August 6, 2023 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

When I was a kid, my mom taught me a very important lesson about money: you have to spend some and save some and give some away. I remember standing there in our dining room with my little piggy bank learning you need to spend some, save some, give some away. Spend it, save it, give it away.

The question that we're thinking about today has to do with the last one – to whom should we give that money to when we give it away? Here's the question:

How important is it to give to Christian missions versus secular charities? Is it important to give to groups doing charitable work in Jesus' name like Compassion or Christian Gleaners or is it just as well to give to secular charities like United Way and the Red Cross?

That's a good question and an important one too. We all have a finite amount of money that we're willing to donate; how do we decide who we're going to support? Does it matter if we give to Christian organizations or are secular charities just as good? How concerned should we be to 'give it away' to groups that are doing Christian work over general acts of humanitarian goodness in the world?

I am going to attempt to give you an answer here but right off the bat, there's something we need to address right away. And that's this: there are good Christian charities and there are bad Christian charities. There are good secular charities and there are bad secular charities.

Whenever a charity, Christian or not, is spending more on staff and admin and marketing than actually addressing the problem they claim to address, that's a bad charity. You want to support good charities who are transparent and accountable to their donors and who are actually doing the work that they claim to be doing. So let's just acknowledge that right off the bat and just assume that when I'm talking about charities, Christian or otherwise, I'm talking about good, transparent, accountable charities who are doing their work with integrity. So there's that.

Now, to the question – how important is it to give to Christian missions versus secular charities? – I would say that there are a couple of ways to think about this and I want to give you both.

So first, let's talk about what I would call the **restorative work of God** in the world.

This way of thinking is REALLY big picture and sees the world through the lens of Creation-Fall-Restoration.

When God created the world, everything was good. There was no sin. There was no suffering. There was no economic inequality or class hierarchy or disease or pain. Everything was just GOOD.

But when Adam and Eve put themselves before God (as we all have), sin entered the world and everything went to pieces. Relationships got broken, family dynamics were all messed up, ideas about right and wrong and equality and justice got flipped on their heads, and even Creation itself was subjected to decay.ⁱ Disease and disaster entered into the GOOD world that God had made.

But, God, being rich in mercy, was not satisfied to let our sin mess up His good Creation and so He sent His Son Jesus into the world to begin the work of restoring the world to its prior goodness.

We often think of Jesus' coming to earth in terms of salvation but Jesus' mission was much larger than that. Jesus came to restore the whole of Creation.

Colossians 1:19-20 says:

19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross (Col 1:19-20 NIV).

Jesus came to redeem us, yes, but He also came to reconcile all things back to God, to begin the work of restoring Creation to the pristine goodness that it had before the Fall. That's why Jesus' teaching was so often accompanied by miracles. His miracles demonstrated God's power breaking into the world to deal with disease and hunger and need. Of course, His mission meant saving souls but it also meant addressing poverty,ⁱⁱ alleviating suffering and fighting back against the powers of sin and disease that plague our world. And that work continues today.

Whenever an organization addresses these issues, whether they acknowledge it or not, they are taking part in the restorative work that Jesus began when He came to earth. The Red Cross, the United Way, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, the hospital Foundation, they are all participating in the work of restoration that Jesus began when He came to earth.

And that's important work that needs to be done. We NEED to address poverty, we NEED to alleviate suffering, we NEED to study disease to see how we can treat it and we NEED to root out human trafficking and any charity that's doing this kind of work is a valuable charity. ANY charity has the potential to participate in Jesus' restorative work in the world and so I think you can make a decent argument for supporting charities of all kind, Christian or not.

So that's the first way to think about this question; the second takes it a step further. I'm calling this one the **'redemptive restorative'** way of thinking.

Because, yes, Jesus came to restore earth, but HE DID also come to redeem. He came to bring all things back into the relationship with God that we were always meant to have and then to empower us to reflect His goodness here on earth.

And so while many Christian charities do the restorative work of God that secular ones do, they have the added benefit of participating in the redemptive work of God too. They're doing the restorative work of God in a way that also allows people to experience the redeeming love of God for themselves.

I spoke to Shawn Erb over at Friendship House about this and this is what he said:

"Solid Christian charities strive to alleviate the issue that they are focused on while at the same time advancing the Kingdom of God. I will use Friendship House as an example. We strive to minister to and help those in poverty while at the same time giving the hope and peace that is only found through the Gospel. In this example not only does your money get used wisely but it also makes an eternal difference."ⁱⁱⁱ

I think that that's an important point to make. Good Christian charities will address the problems that people face in the world but they'll do it in a way that is shaped by the Gospel, motivated by the Gospel and expressive of the Gospel. (They do things in line with Jesus' values in a way that expresses Jesus' character and mission, out of love for Jesus Himself). Any charity can do good work in the world, but only Christian charities will do it in a way that reveals that God is good. That's why it's important to support Christian charities; they're doing good work in the world while at the same time demonstrating that God is good. That's the redemptive-restorative answer to our question.

So when we think about our question 'How important is it to give to Christian charities versus secular charities?', I think we can make the case that both are valuable.

But I think that the question that we really need to ask here is this:

As Christians, how can we best use our money to enable others to experience both the restoring and redeeming love of God for themselves?

Because let's be honest. We all have a limited amount of money that we are willing to give away. We need to use that money in a way that is consistent with our conviction as believers that Jesus is the greatest ever and that His mission of restoration and redemption is worth giving both our lives AND our money to.

As Christians, we want to see people's physical condition improved, but we also want to see their spiritual condition improved too. We've experienced that in our own hearts! So if I'm going to spend some and save some and give some away, I want to give it away in a way that lets others experience the love of Jesus too.

Give charitably to enable others to experience the restoring AND redeeming love of God for themselves.

That's what I want you to take home today. Give in a way that will enable others to know the restoring AND redeeming love of God for themselves.

Now listen, I'm not here to tell you what to do and who to give money to. That's your decision entirely and circumstances may arise where it will make a ton of sense to give to a child's school or an emergency relief fund or something.

But I think something that we all need to do is shift our paradigm from 'giving to charity' to 'partnering in the work of the Kingdom.'

Do you see what I mean? A lot of people think in terms of 'giving to charity.' And that's good! Giving to charity is a good thing to do. It's good to be generous.

But as believers, I think we need to take it a step further and say 'am I giving to a charity that reflects my conviction that God is good and helps others to see that too, even as they're addressing material needs?' I think that we need to be intentional and strategic about partnering with Christian charities that do both restorative and redemptive work. I don't think it has to be an either/or thing with social care and soul care; get you a charity that can do both. Don't just 'give to charity' but 'invest in the Kingdom.'

I think that's important for us as individuals; I think that it's important for us as a church too. We exist as a body to help other people to know God and grow in relationship with Him, to show His goodness in the world and to share His blessings with others; we need to be very intentional about giving to organizations that are doing that kind of work. Again, we're not just giving because it's a nice thing to do; we're giving money to support and partner with brothers and sisters in faith who are doing the ministry that we ourselves endeavour to do. I often think 'for every dollar I give to United Way or the Food Bank, for all the good that it will do, that's one less dollar that Shawn at Friendship House or Charlie at Why Not or Julie at the Pregnancy Centre will have to work with. I think it's important to support them as much as we can.

It's not wrong to give to secular charities; many of them do good work. But I would encourage you; don't just 'give to charity;' 'invest in the Kingdom.' Give in a way that will enable others to know the restoring AND redeeming love of God for themselves.

ⁱ Romans 8:19 The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.

20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope

21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

ⁱⁱ Whenever we are addressing issues of poverty and homelessness and economic inequality, we are playing a part in the restorative work of the Kingdom. Time and again, God tells us to care for those in need – Deuteronomy 15:11 - There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.

ⁱⁱⁱ Personal Correspondence.