

# Welfare

## Policy Briefing Note 2

April 2015

Version 1

### Introduction

This is one of a series of documents covering various policy topic areas that are aimed at helping people to compare an approach proposed by any political party to the underlying principles that we find in the Bible.

This series of documents, which will be expanded and kept updated, is politically neutral and represents a unique approach, starting as it does from the Bible and building upwards.

The policies and approaches to a topic area of several of the political parties may line up with all or some of the principles. It allows a person to have a baseline on which to measure and compare.

Each easy to read document will cover a separate topic, and so you can look at a particular area of interest to you or build up a picture over a number of topic areas. We hope you find this a useful resource not only at election time but also in the future.

### Biblical Principles Underpinning Welfare Policy

What does the Bible say about providing for the poor and needy in our society. What principles should underpin our Welfare policy?

Proverbs 28v27 tells us “ He who gives to the poor will never want but he who shuts his eyes will have many curses.”

In Mark 14v7 Jesus said, “For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you will not always have me.”

### Dignity

We are all created in the image of God (Genesis 2v7) . Accordingly people in need of welfare provision should be treated with dignity and respect. Policy should not be influenced by those who label people on welfare inappropriately.

The majority of those claiming welfare benefits are doing so through no fault of their own; and in any case a welfare system adopting Biblical principles will award benefits on the basis of need, not fault. It is easy to find references in the Bible to our duty to look after the poor, the needy, the hungry, the unclothed, widows, the homeless and fatherless. But it does not say these people must be blameless.

Jesus in his parable of the Prodigal (or lost) Son beautifully illustrated the attitude of God our Father towards the poverty-stricken and former profligate: he laid on a feast. (Luke 15:11-32)

### Generosity

The Bible tells us to be generous in our provision for the needy. In Luke 14 v.13 we read that when attending a lavish meal at the invitation of a ruler of the Pharisees Jesus advised his host

"But when you give a feast, invite the poor the crippled the lame the blind and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you."

Proverbs 11v.25-26 advises (in The Message translation)

“The world of the generous gets larger and larger; the world of the stingy gets smaller and smaller.

The one who blesses others is abundantly blessed; those who help others are helped.”

These are challenging principles when considering policy towards needy citizens.

### Personal responsibility

The Bible was written in a time and place without a welfare system, however in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 we find Paul emphasising that “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat”, and Paul himself highlights in the same letter (2 Thessalonians 3:8) that he worked “night and day” so that he was not a burden to others.

There needs to be found the right balance in the provision of welfare between ensuring dignity and generosity towards needy citizens and ensuring personal responsibility is not usurped or ignored.

## Welfare continued

### Speak up and Care

Throughout the whole of the Bible we are told to care for the poor. Welfare is a means to do this where either that person or their relatives are not in a position to do so. It is clearly the mark of a decent society that it cares for the vulnerable and sick. Given the challenges that face governments financially at present, it has focused the thinking that it is the duty of Christians to ensure that those who are vulnerable, the poor and needy in our midst continue to be cared for and not marginalised. Christians should be the voice of the poor to those who may feel that their needs are too easily ignored.

In Isaiah 58 v 6 the writer poses the question of what constitutes true fasting:

"...Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter- when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood"

This prophetic voice in the Bible challenges us to ensure the poor and vulnerable are looked after.

### Well organised and systematic

The Bible also teaches us to be systematic and organised in our providing for the needy. Deuteronomy 14 v 28-9 sets out how the early Jewish settlers were to organise themselves in this regard.

"Every three years bring tithes of that year's produce to the storehouse for the priests, the aliens, fatherless and widows." Again in the book of Acts we see the Apostles organising the early church, putting a system in place to ensure that its widows would be fed. We are in a nation where food banks have grown to be common place. Christian churches have accepted responsibility to care for the hungry and needy. It has been heartening to see many churches setting up and maintaining food banks. This shows the church stepping up to the challenge of being organised and generous in the care of the needy, an example which might inform the approach of welfare policy in government.

The book of James argues that "pure and undefiled religion is to visit those who are widows and orphans"; in modern parlance we might refer to pensioners and children. It is a biblical response to care for such groups and ensure that such provision continues even in times of economic challenges. A society that does not care systematically for these groups is failing to follow James's clear guidance.



### Welfare Reform

In times of economic adversity where governments are looking for ways to contain expenditure does the Bible offer any guidance?

Proverbs 6 vs. 1-5

warns against financial folly.

"If you've impulsively promised the shirt off your back and now find yourself shivering out in the cold, Friend don't waste a minute, get yourself out of that mess." (The Message Bible).

No-one, including nations, should over extend his financial resources, but maintain a balance between generosity and good stewardship. Unwise financial commitments are to be avoided.

But care is needed to ensure that welfare reform does not become a euphemism for cuts to benefits.

In Jeremiah 29v11 the Bible tells us that God has a plan for people's lives. Lives throughout the Bible were transformed by God's power and applying this to welfare policy suggests it should be about enabling those who can work to reach their potential and so contribute to the welfare of their families and the wider community.



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