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Welfare: Beneficial or Impractical?

What is welfare? What is its purpose? Does it help the American public or does it destroy them? Despite its being a fairly new action in the United States, its existence not yet reaching a hundred years, welfare has already made a large impact on America, poor and rich alike. While it's normally a sensitive topic to discuss, especially between liberals and conservatives, it's a necessary one due to the fact that it takes up about half of our government's budget. But in order to understand welfare, you must, like any other topic, look at its history first.

Because of the stock market crash in 1929, the Great Depression of the 1930's caused many people to lose their jobs, life savings, houses, businesses, and even families. Because of the severity of the Great Depression, Franklin D. Roosevelt put the first welfare program into effect in 1935. This was called Social Security, or social insurance, a program which provided the poor and disabled with money and health care, a thing still around today, although nowadays the term 'Social Security' is used mainly for the program that gives benefits to the elderly over 65. Roosevelt made it law that another percentage of people's income be given to taxes so that when they reached retirement, the money would be given back and they could live on what they had earned. Until the time comes when they must pay back the retired person, the government can use that percentage of people's income for whatever purposes. Social Security has become such a big concept that people started having social security numbers and cards from birth, and has become a way of identification for each American citizen. Since 1935 numerous welfare programs have been put into effect. AFDC/TANF (Aid to Families with Dependant Children/Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), Medicare (government-paid health care for the poor), Medicaid (government-paid healthcare for the elderly),

Food Stamps, SSI (Supplemental Security Income), and HUD housing programs are some examples. But does welfare really do what the government and influential politicians had wanted and expected it to? Is it really necessary? Does it cause people to become dependant on the government or does it temporarily help people back onto their feet? Is welfare the great light that has finally dawned on America after so many years or is it just another feeble attempt on the government's part to do something it can't?

First of all, let's establish who exactly the poor people of America are. Officially, since 2007, one person is in poverty if they receive \$10,000 a year and a family of four is considered poor if they receive under \$20,000. Now that really doesn't seem like a lot, does it? But that's enough to, if you strictly budget, buy a cheap car, a subsidized apartment, an old TV, and some food. Not quite the idea of comfortable living, is it? Now let's look at the official poverty line for many countries in South America, Africa, and Asia. There's no official "money line" as in America, but you are considered middle class or above if you have a house (or hut), land, food, and some sort of means of wealth such as livestock or farms. If you have a reasonably nice house, car, TV, shower, etc. you're considered rich! In some countries, it goes so far as to that the "middle class" I just described is considered rich and the poor are those who are lucky to eat three times a week. The point is that the "poor" in America are richer than the "rich" in many other parts of the world! And yet we are constantly complaining to the government to help us out because we cannot afford to do this, that or the other. Don't hear what I'm not saying. In many cases, America being one of them, cars are a necessity as are phones, food, refrigerators, etc. What I am saying is that much of what we consider to be "necessities" are, in fact, not.

It goes without saying that there really are poor people in America. There are those who don't have homes, who don't eat because they can't find or afford food, and who have ragged clothes that hardly cover their entire bodies let alone keep them warm. These are the truly poor people of America, those without shelter, food, and clothing. Yet welfare is aimed at those who are above that level of poverty. The homeless don't receive welfare checks because they don't have addresses! The American government is being confronted constantly about helping those in need who have more than the real poor people. The American government not only listens but does all it can to do something it absolutely can't do: eradicate poverty. There will always be poor people among us according to Matthew 26:11. If our goal is to completely wipe out poverty from the United States, we will fail and there's nothing welfare can do about it. But if our goal is to lessen it and to genuinely help those in need. Well then, that's a different story.

The chief way America is trying to combat poverty is through welfare. That is, making out checks from the government to those who apply to their code of requirements such as making under a certain amount of money, having children who are minors, being disabled, and/or being a single parent. But does it, and I've asked this before, really help them or does it just make them dependant on the government for money? There are two strong arguments for this topic. One of which is of those who are for welfare and say that people on welfare really just want to get out of their poverty hole and get themselves back on their feet. The other of which is of those who are against welfare and say that it encourages people to be lazy and expect the government to do what they really should be doing. Let's take a look at some facts. Fact number one: Human beings are not naturally good. If you don't believe me look around you. Look anywhere. Look in history, in

books, in current news, in your very house, and even in your very self. It's not our tendency to have the noblest character or put others first or give away instead of taking. It's a human tendency to want to get something for nothing. That's why the lottery, raffles, prize contests, get-rich-quick schemes, etc are all very popular. We love getting something for free. But, that's not to say that there isn't a desire in a person's heart to work. This brings us to fact number two: People were made to work and we feel accomplished when we fulfill that purpose. Despite humanity's fall, we still have a conscience and a longing to work hard for something. Unfortunately many people have stifled that desire and only know and want to continue only knowing a life of ease. Surprisingly, this isn't just something that happens to rich people. Last time I checked everyone was human so it tends to happen everywhere. Fact number three: The way welfare is set up it doesn't inspire people to work hard or to get back on their feet. It tends to stir up laziness in a person due to the fact that, for most people, all you have to do is sign some paperwork and you get a monthly check from the government. If that's not an enticement to a person who wants something for nothing then I don't know what is. Again, there are always exceptions. Some people get into welfare because they are out of a job despite the fact that they work hard and genuinely wanted to provide for their families. Welfare doesn't encourage these people to continue to have this mindset, nor does it keep the "lazy people" from continuing to be lazy. But if we don't use welfare, than what do we use? What about the people who are poor because of reasons which are out their hands? Should they be left in the slums just because there is no one to help them? Absolutely not!

This brings us to another controversy: Welfare vs. charitable organizations. Anti-welfare groups would say that welfare is insufficient and impersonal; that welfare doesn't give what the individual needs but only gives what they could get in a different way. On the other hand, pro-welfare groups would say that if welfare were cut out and it was left up to the American public to take care of their poor that they wouldn't give enough to make up for what welfare does and sufficiently help the poor in their need. This is something to be concerned about because that would propose quite a problem. But think of it this way: People are already giving to private charities and churches even though they're giving to welfare as well. The money that funds welfare comes from somewhere. That somewhere just happens to be taxes, one of the government's ways of financing its budget. That would be quite a bit of extra money in the American taxpayer's pockets. "But who's to say they'll put it towards charity?" you may ask. That is a very valid question. The answer is that many probably wouldn't. But 60-70 cents of every dollar that goes to the welfare fund actually goes to the people who run the welfare program rather than the welfare receivers themselves. It's much more likely that the poor would receive more money through this direct donation than they are right now through the welfare system.

In addition to the fact that charities and church-led organizations would give more to the poor than welfare does, acknowledge also the fact that welfare is very broad in its "giving." In essence, what welfare gives is very general as opposed to specific in what it gives and to whom. What it boils down to is that human beings were made to provide for themselves and make their own money. Obviously there are those who won't or are unable to make their own money. Welfare, on one hand, just gives them what they want,

money, and sends them away. Charity on the other hand, gives the poor what they need in order to get what it is that they want. In addition, charities can make certain guidelines and requirements that welfare can't or won't. Let's say hypothetically that two men need money because both lost their jobs. The first of them lost his job because he was irresponsible and the second because the business he worked for was going through a tough time financially and had to lay him off. The government would give them both welfare checks because they both make under a certain amount of money. Contrarily, churches and private charities can make rules and guidelines. They can give away food and clothing and even room to those who are on the streets and have nothing. Or they can give people jobs to do to earn money, shelter, clothing or food. Public picnics are a common way to give away free food and even checks being given away to those that charities and churches know will use them responsibly is a practice. The first man, instead of just being given money, can be told that he cannot be given actual money unless he works for it and is responsible with it.

Instead of handing money out like candy, there's another solution that works considerably well and has since the beginning of time. This solution is the concept of work. Many people have an idea that work is a curse that was placed upon Adam in the Garden of Eden when he and Eve deliberately disobeyed God, but this just isn't true. My dad recently preached a sermon on it. He pointed out the fact that in Genesis 3 the ground was cursed, not Adam. Read Genesis 2:15-16 and note God's words to Adam: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You are able to eat from any tree in the garden;" (italics added). Work was a concept since the birth of the first man! Not only was it a

concept, it was a necessity and a responsibility. Because Adam worked the garden and took care of it, he and Eve could eat from it whenever they liked. Now after the Fall, hard labor and sweat (yuck!) were both brought into the picture. This is because now the ground is harder to work and we all now eat "by the sweat of our brow." Work is a responsibility. Because of the Fall it's become harder and less pleasant, but it hasn't become less important. Paul says the same thing in 2 Thessalonians 3:10. He first talks about how he wasn't a burden to the Thessalonians when he came to preach to them the gospel. He didn't even eat their food, but worked for his own. He writes, "For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: 'If a man will not work, he shall not eat.'" He then goes on to say that some of them were busybodies and he encourages them to settle down and to earn the bread they eat. Paul isn't saying anything new here. Hard work is something that has existed and has been mandatory since the dawn of creation. Even God worked hard to create the world and he rested on the seventh day. No one is above God; if God works hard, how much more so should we! Scripture speaks on it as does the human nature itself! Think about a time when you accomplished something that was either great or seemed great to you. Did you work hard to make it or cause it to happen? The most common answer is "yes"! Children are a great example. Whenever little children work hard at a project, it doesn't matter what it looks like when it's finished. They're just proud that they worked hard at something and they finished it (as are their parents!). We haven't changed; we're still the same way, even as adults. Some people have stifled that desire and have become addicted to laziness, but that was not and is not God's plan.

Likewise, in no way are the poor excluded from the concept of work. God rewards those who continue to work hard, especially when times are hard. This is why God instigated gleaning laws in Israel. Leviticus 23:22 says, "When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God." Notice that these people are still working while they are being provided for. Gleaning isn't all sunshine and roses, but they are still taken care of. Look at this in contrast to welfare. In gleaning you are working hard for every bit of food you gather. You aren't "losing your dignity" as it is sometimes called, nor are you comfortable enough in the poverty state to be tempted to stay there and live off of someone else. This is a stark contrast to the welfare concept, which hands people money when they don't have enough and call's it a "stepping stone to getting back on one's feet." The law God puts forth establishes, encourages, and demands hard work while the law the government makes lets people have the choice to work hard or stay where they are, the latter being a more common practice among welfare recipients than one would think.

But then what about those who can't work? Those who are disabled or too old or too young or incapable, should we discard them like trash just because they're "unnecessary" to society? Absolutely not! Those who are unable to work still need to eat; they are no less human than the rest of us. Let me point out though that there are many things that some disabled and elderly people can still do to earn money. Most will find that they can have a business at home such as cooking, babysitting, artistry, sewing, and much more if you think about it. Yet there are people who just can't work for themselves. These people would include the elderly who are handicapped or can't function properly to

work, young children, and severely disabled individuals. These people are not to be forgotten. The first group of people that should step in to help are their families. 1 Timothy 5:8 and 16 says, "If anyone does not provide for their relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever... If any woman who is a believer has widows in her family, she should help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need." Family responsibility has always been an obligation that is highly honored, especially in early and moral civilizations such as Israel. Israel had a system of family provision called kinsmen redemption. Whenever a husband died and the widow was unable to provide for herself and had to sell her property, it was the brother of the deceased husband that was responsible to buy the property from her and take care of her for the rest of either his or her life. If that brother died then it continued down the line. It was a public disgrace to refuse to provide for your cousin or brother's widow. That's because God holds family responsibility highly and in honor. Paul speaks God's heart when he says that it's a believer's responsibility to not just care and work for himself but to work and provide for his family and relatives as well. This is extremely important.

There is a considerably large amount of people without families and those who don't have families willing to provide for them. In fact, it's much more than any of us probably know. What about them? If you recall the last half of verse 16 in 1 Timothy 5, you would remember that Paul says "so that the church can help those widows who are really in need." Paul understood that there were those who were unable to provide adequately for themselves and had no one to help them. That's why the Church was commanded to. James 1:15 tells us that "religion that God our Father accepts as pure and

faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." Acts chapter 6 talks about the problem that the church had with serving all of the widows. To solve this problem, they appointed seven righteous men of the faith to take over this particular ministry so that the apostles could devote themselves to ministry of the word and prayer. They prayed a long time about this and they were careful to pick righteous, godly, faithful men to do this important task. God doesn't take helping the poor lightly. He has always commanded those who are rich to never oppress the poor and richly rewarded and blessed those who helped those who couldn't help themselves.

You see, the idea that nothing can replace welfare adequately enough is a lie. There are alternatives that are much, much better! Welfare can't do what it was intended to because it's run by our government, whose main objective isn't to help the poor people, but to make America a wealthier nation by any means. Such a materialistic outlook such as this isn't going to strike the heart of poverty and diminish the amount of poor people. In addition, welfare works at curing the symptoms of poverty instead of the cause of it. This ethic is like trying to stop a little kid from stealing by giving him the candy that he was trying to steal for, or like pulling up a weed without its roots. The problem is just going to come back, most likely bigger and worse too. Welfare is a twisted version of what the Lord already did and has asked us to do. Instead of the government giving away money that it doesn't have and forcing money out of the pockets of people who may not even want to give, people are told to give to those who aren't doing as well as they are. Anyone can give. It doesn't just have to be money, it can be a meal, or gift, or a job. The possibilities are endless. But if we keep on trying to diminish poverty the way we are

then we are in for a surprise that won't be so sweet. God has called us to work hard and to earn the bread we eat. He commands the Church to help those who are in unfortunate circumstances. It's a lie that welfare is a necessity. It's not even just unnecessary. It's a waste. The government can't do anything that the public can't do. In fact there is much that the government can't do that the public can. We find ourselves in a rut because we're so selfish that we expect other people to pay for us, even if they're too stingy to want to! This isn't how it's supposed to be and we can't experience a truly healthy economy until we deal with it the way it needs to be dealt with instead of just looking for temporary ways to "keep it in balance." We need to learn to work the way the Lord works, to help the hurt the way the Lord helps them, and to give generously the way Lord Jesus Christ gives.