132727 - Taking help and asking for it from the state and from the church

the question

I live in America and we take some free services, especially since we are regarded as having limited income. But some of these services, such as food for example, can be taken from the churches. Is that permissible?.

Detailed answer

There is nothing wrong with taking help from the state or from organizations based on donations, even if they are churches, so long as that does not lead to compromising on any issue of religion or approving anything wrong or the children being influenced and so on. But refraining from that and doing without it is preferable, because the upper hand (the one that gives) is better than the lower (the one that takes), especially with regard to taking from the church which usually has ulterior motives in what it gives to the Muslims. Al-Bukhaari (1428) narrated from Hakeem ibn Hizaam (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “The upper hand (the one that gives) is better than the lower (the one that takes). Start with those for whom you are responsible. The best of charity is that which is given when you can afford it, and whoever refrains (from taking charity), Allah will help him; whoever tries to do without charity, Allah will make him independent of means. ”

Al-Bukhaari (1429) and Muslim (1033) narrated from Ibn ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) that he said: I heard the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) say, when he was on the minbar, speaking about charity and refraining from begging: “The upper hand is better than the lower hand, and the upper hand is the one that gives and the lower hand is the one that receives.”

Asking for charity from people is something blameworthy, even if one is asking from a Muslim, unless the one who asks is forced to do so, because the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Asking for help causes a man to lose face, except when a man asks someone in a position of authority or asks for something that he has no choice but to ask for.”

Classed as saheeh by al-Tirmidhi and by al-Albaani in Saheeh al-Tirmidhi.

It was also narrated by Abu Dawood (1639) as follows: “Begging (is like) wounds that a person scars his face with. So whoever wishes to save face may do so, and whoever wishes not to save face may do so, except if a person asks a person of authority, or is in a situation in which he finds no alternative.”

It says in Subul al-Salaam (1/548): Wounds means marks or traces. As for his asking from a person in authority, there is no blame in that, because he is only asking for what he is entitled to from the bayt al-maal, and it is not a favour on the part of the person in authority, because he is acting as a trustee, so it is like a person asking the trustee to give him something to which he is entitled that he has with him. End quote.

Al-Bukhaari (1475) and Muslim (1040) narrated that ‘Abd-Allah ibn ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “A man will keep on begging from people until he comes on the Day of Resurrection with not a bit of flesh on his face.”

And Muslim (1041) narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: “Whoever begs from the people in order to accumulate wealth, it is as if he is asking for a live coal, so let him ask for a little or a lot.”

What is meant by the words “Whoever begs from the people in order to accumulate wealth” is that he asks of people in order to accumulate a lot of wealth when he is not in need of it.

In these hadeeths there is an eloquent rebuke, which is clearly aimed at putting people off begging, except one who is forced to do that and can find no other alternative.

Based on that, so long as you are not in urgent need of help, you should refrain from asking for it, but if you are in need of it, there is nothing wrong with you asking for it and taking it.

We ask Allah to make you independent of means from His bounty.

And Allah knows best.