

MATTHEW 6:1-4

BENEVOLENCE ACCORDING TO JESUS

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

“Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”¹

Canada is one of a handful of nations that encourage charitable giving. The government does this through providing tax incentives. Few nations beyond the English-speaking world encourage such benevolence through considerations under the tax code. Consequently, the nations most noted for encouraging charitable contributions share in common a heritage of a Christian foundation.

Living in a nation that encourages generosity should result in marked benevolence among those living under such rules. However, much of the generosity that has marked individual Canadians in years past has been stifled by the fact that governments tend to be “charitable” with moneys taken from taxpayers. Fewer Canadians are eager to give generously when they believe they have already given generously through the decisions of politicians at various levels.

The giving that is done by Canadians is increasingly done on an emotional basis, rather than as planned giving. Charities long ago discovered that photos of impoverished children and videos portraying heart-breaking destitution and scenes of major disasters motivate people to give. However, such giving is sporadic and spasmodic. However, the giving that is promoted in the Word of God is systematic and studied—it is purposeful and planned. Undoubtedly, we will benefit from a reminder from the Master concerning benevolence.

THE OVERARCHING PRINCIPLE — “Beware of practising your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them.” Let me read that opening statement from a freer translation. “See to it that your effort to do right is not based on a desire to be popular.”² Or, consider yet another translation that seeks to capture the thrust of Jesus’ warning delivered to His disciples. “Be especially careful when you are trying to be good so that you don’t make a performance out of it.”³ Taken at face value, Jesus’ words indicate that there is pronounced danger in performing religious duties, perhaps even in seeking God’s glory.

The danger is related less to what is done than it is to the motive for a particular act. This should not be a surprise to anyone who is even moderately conversant with the Word of God, as God is always more concerned with motives than with actions. It is an axiom of that Faith that *we can do the right thing while holding the wrong motive, and dishonour God*. It is not that actions are unimportant, but that doing the right thing for the wrong reason cannot honour the Master. God examines the heart, testing the motive for our service.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version**, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Clarence Jordan, **The Cotton Patch Gospel** (Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Macon, GA 2004)

³ Eugene H. Peterson, **The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language** (NavPress, Colorado Spring, CO 2002)

The passage enunciates a principle that is unpacked in this portion of the Sermon Jesus preached—righteous acts are to be done quietly. Whether fasting [MATTHEW 6:16-18], praying [MATTHEW 6:5-15] or giving gifts [MATTHEW 6:1-4], the child of God must check his or her motive. There is within the human heart a perverse tendency toward seeking approval or admiration from others when we act. However, God calls His followers to act quietly, not ostentatiously. The text presents, if you will, a flip side to MATTHEW 5:16, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” Underscore the frequently neglected principle in your mind—*There must be balance in the believer’s actions.* We must seek God’s glory in all things, constantly assessing our actions in light of our motives.

Earlier, in Matthew 5:16, Jesus says that the entire life-style and character of the disciple must reflect the character of the Father. The subject in our text is specifically religious actions. The difference in the two passages is the difference between holiness and presumptive piety. People should recognise that we are godly by our general demeanour and the character of our lives—we are honest in our dealings, we are sincere and fair in our treatment of others, we are conscious of the presence of the Lord. However, through mere external acts, we can gain a false reputation for goodness. It is easier to be a religious hypocrite than to gain an honest reputation for being a righteous individual.

Three of the greatest acts of piety in the Jewish Faith were fasting, praying and giving. The Master uses these acts to teach a vital truth. He assumes that they will be done, and therefore He builds on what would have been somewhat common actions for those among whom He lived and ministered at that time. Things are not very different today. We hold in high esteem—and rightly so—people who are willing to fast, dedicated to prayer and quick to be charitable toward those in need. However, you and I know that a person can deny themselves every sort of comfort, recite multiple prayers or construct the most moving petitions, or give generously in addressing various needs and yet fail to honour God.

However, our actions must always be dictated by a desire for the Father’s glory, rather than seeking our own glory. If we will please God, we must keep His desire foremost in our mind. On the other hand, in seeking what is convenient, we may be comfortable, but we cannot ever be pleasing before the True and Living God. There is no simple formula to make life easy. The Christian life demands balance, and balance requires constant reassessment and adjustment to fulfil the will of God. This is a restatement of the principle we just stated—a principle that must be fixed firmly in our minds if we will please the Master: *The Christian life demands balance, and balance requires constant reassessment and adjustment.*

The context for biblical giving is the natural outworking of the Spirit in the life of a believer. There is an innate desire to serve God in every believer. From time-to-time, the child of God will become greatly exercised by some particular need, and they will be so focused on seeking the mind of the Master or on seeing the will of the Father fulfilled that they forsake normal pleasures. Like David of old, they may avoid grooming themselves, or more likely, they will avoid food for a period until they have assurance that God has heard their plea and that His answer is on the way.

Likewise, the child of God will pray. She will not be content to say prayers, but she will ask God for her needs, pleading for His glory and asking for His will to be accomplished in her life. Should she become so busy with the mundane aspects of life that she neglects prayer, she will know that the resulting loss of power is because she has failed to speak to God in secret prayer and she will again seek Him and His will, asking for His glory to be manifest through giving her the answers she seeks.

Finally, you may be assured that the child of God will be generous. He will be generous for two great reasons—he is taught to be generous and he has the heart of the Father. These are the assumptions that we must now explore. He will not be motivated solely by emotional tugs, but he will be motivated by the desire for God’s glory through his generosity. He will act conscientiously, deliberately and systematically to glorify the Lord God through providing for the needs both of God’s people and the work which the Master has entrusted to His people. Whatever else may be said of the child of God, he will be generous.

THE BIBLICAL ASSUMPTIONS — The Master implies at least two assumptions concerning His people, either of which reveals the work of the Spirit in the life of an individual. The Master assumes that His people will be compassionate and that they will exhibit selfless generosity. Moments ago, I stated that the people of God will act in this manner because they are taught to do so and because they are prompted to be generous and to show compassion because the Spirit of God dwells in them.

The Master Assumes that His People Will Show Compassion toward the Needy.

“When you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others.” In Judaism, providing charitable gifts was a religious duty, not a philanthropic option. Under the New Testament teaching, God’s people act deliberately and systematically in providing for God’s work.

God instructed His ancient people, “If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. Take care lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart and you say, ‘The seventh year, the year of release is near,’ and your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the LORD against you, and you be guilty of sin. You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land’” [DEUTERONOMY 15:11].

This is nothing less than a generalised application of the principle that guided the people of God under the Law. The LORD provided a practical application of the Sabbath principle in EXODUS 23:10, 11: “For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the beasts of the field may eat. You shall do likewise with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard.” The land was not merely to lie fallow, but the poor were to be encouraged to glean among the untended fields, vineyards and orchards during the Sabbath year.

The principle was given to Israel as an ongoing expectation when God commanded: “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God” [LEVITICUS 19:9, 10].

The foundation for this generosity is that the LORD is generous toward mankind. The Psalmist has written: [The LORD] “has distributed freely; He has given to the poor” [PSALM 112:9]. Therefore, the Word of God pronounces a benediction on those who are generous toward the poor:

“Blessed is the one who considers the poor!
In the day of trouble the LORD delivers him;
the LORD protects him and keeps him alive;
he is called blessed in the land;
you do not give him up to the will of his enemies.
The LORD sustains him on his sickbed;
in his illness you restore him to full health.”

[PSALM 41:1-3]

In this Psalm, David anticipated the words his son would write in the Proverbs:

“Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD,
and he will repay him for his deed.”

[PROVERBS 19:17]

“The righteous person cares for the legal rights of the poor.”⁴

[PROVERBS 29:7]

Of course, Christians are commanded “to do good, to be rich in good deeds, to be generous givers, sharing with others”⁵ [1 TIMOTHY 6:18]. Giving because we are commanded to do so is commendable, but we have the Spirit of Christ dwelling within. The Master gave Himself for our sake, as the Apostle has said: “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich” [2 CORINTHIANS 8:9]. Since His Spirit now lives in us, it is impossible that we would do anything other than reveal the reality of His presence through compassion and generosity toward the need of others. We know that God “gives generously to all without reproach” [JAMES 1:5] and that “every generous act and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights”⁶ [JAMES 1:17]. Therefore, having experienced the generosity of the Living God, and having His Spirit live within, how can we be other than generous toward the need of others? Christians know that Christ “gave Himself up for us” [EPHESIANS 5:2]

I can appeal to no finer example of this attitude that is to prevail among us than that of the Macedonian churches of whom Paul wrote. “We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us” [2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-5].

The Master Anticipates Selfless Generosity from His People. “When you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others.” Again, the Master taught those who would follow Him, “When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

⁴ The NET Bible First Edition (Biblical Studies Press, 19996-2006)

⁵ The NET Bible First Edition, op. cit.

⁶ The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version (Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN 2003)

Believers sometimes imagine that their giving must be totally secret. On the basis of the fourth verse of our text, they refuse to accept tax receipts as permitted by our government, or they refuse to let the congregational treasurer know what they have given lest they violate what is taught in this passage of Scripture. However, balancing what is written with the previous command given in **MATTHEW 5:16**, we are being taught to avoid ostentatious displays of piety.

The teaching here anticipates that which Peter provides at a later time when he writes, “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds” [**1 PETER 2:12**]. God expects our goodness and our generosity to be known to others, but always conducted in such a manner that glorifies His Name. In other words, we are not to compete with God for glory; He is to be honoured—not us. Moreover, a careful reading of the first verse reveals that it is not the giving that is in view, but the fact that the pretentious display before other people is “in order to be seen by them.” Bear in mind that we who are redeemed were “created in Christ Jesus for good works” [**EPHESIANS 2:10**].

Must all giving be in secret? Not necessarily. You need to remember that everyone in the early church knew that Barnabas had given the income from the sale of his land. In that congregation the needy were provided as members sold their houses and lands and gave it to the Apostles to distribute. So we read, “Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet” [**ACTS 4:36, 37**].

Perhaps I can suggest a practical test for your giving. If, after you have given a gift, people say, “Wow, you are really generous,” perhaps the emphasis was upon you. However, if your gift leads people to say, “God is so gracious to enable you to give generously,” then you may be confident that the Spirit was leading in the action. In other words, is the focus on the Master, or on you? God is to be glorified; not you.

In light of these instructions, it should be obvious that Jesus is not teaching us to give gifts to the poor—He assumes that we do show generosity toward the poor! The concern of the Master is not that His people give, but rather how they give. The Saviour is concerned that our motive be pure so that we are enabled to be more generous still in the future.

Briefly consider the mechanics of giving as demonstrated in Paul’s instruction to the Corinthian Christians. The passage that demonstrates these mechanics comprises two chapters in 2 Corinthians. Though we haven’t time to read chapters eight and nine at this time, I hope you will read these two chapters during the coming week, noting the principles of giving revealed therein. Giving, as outlined by the Apostle, was to be **generous** [**2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-4**] and **sacrificial** [**2 CORINTHIANS 8:12**]. In fact, we cannot speak of this as commanded giving so much as it is grace giving. Paul is not speaking of “tithes” or of a percentage, but rather he is highlighting giving that meets the biblical burden of grace. The generosity expressed the fact that the Macedonian believers “gave themselves first to the Lord” [**2 CORINTHIANS 8:5**]. Thus, giving is to be ***an act of worship***, acknowledging that God has been generous toward us.

Moreover, grace giving is **voluntary** [**2 CORINTHIANS 8:8, 10; 9:7**]. We do not give because of a requirement, or even out of a sense of guilt. Neither must a church be found manipulating the giving of the people of God. Much of the giving by the world is based on guilt. Even Christian organisations have learned that pictures of suffering children tug at the heartstrings and free up the flow of moneys. One major organisation earned the unsavoury reputation of depending upon crises in order to keep the donations coming in. They know that guilt of people that are prospering when they see pictures of their fellowman suffering generates moneys. However, we never see such manipulation either employed or condoned in the Word of God.

Grace giving is to be *responsive* [2 CORINTHIANS 8:10, 11]. Christians are to be sensitive to need and responsive as God reveals the need to them. The giving of God's people is to be *systematic* [1 CORINTHIANS 16:2]; the Corinthians were to "put something aside on the first day of every week." Giving was not to be spasmodic or occasional, but recurring, systematic. Grace giving is to be *proportionate* [2 CORINTHIANS 8:12, 13]. The greater the blessing you have received, the greater your opportunity to give and the greater your responsibility to give generously.

I will note also that grace giving is *thoughtful* [2 CORINTHIANS 9:7] as each believer gives as "he has decided in his heart." Grace giving is *anticipatory* [2 CORINTHIANS 9:8-12]. Before the harvest is complete, before the result of the harvest is known, in faith, the one providing the offering gives to God the first portion of the harvest in anticipation of His blessing.

Let's list those principles to guide our giving so that we see them together. Grace giving is to be *generous, sacrificial, worshipful, voluntary, responsive, systematic, proportionate, thoughtful* and *anticipatory*. Perhaps it would be a good idea to write out this list and keep it near our chequebook so that we can plan our giving week-by-week and also have a plan for responding to exceptional needs as they arise.

THE BIBLICAL CONSIDERATIONS — It should be clear that the Master anticipated that His people will be generous. They will be compassionate. However, there is an aspect of generosity that is sometimes difficult to balance. The needs of our world are overwhelming. Moreover, there are scam artists who depend upon the credulity of Christians.

We are taught in Scripture, "One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches. Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" [GALATIANS 6:6-10].

Money spent on the body may benefit the physical. While those expenditures have value for the moment, there is no fruit for eternity. Money spent in obedience to the Lord in order to spread the message of life and to meet the needs of the impoverished and suffering, has results not only in this present life, but also in eternity.

However, which charities should we support? Let me direct you to a passage of the Word as a means of assisting in answering that query. The passage is found in ACTS 11:27-30. "Prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). So the disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul."

The decision to receive a collection was by consensus of the church. Thus, a principle to guide recipients of our gifts is that *the recipients are approved by the congregation*. It would be reasonable to state that the agencies or individuals that are supported are known to be trustworthy by the congregation. This certainly narrows down the focus of giving somewhat. Moreover, *the purpose of the collection was to meet a need in response to the Spirit's direction*. The collection had as its primary purpose *providing relief for fellow Christians*. A final principle is that *the gifts were administered by the church*. The moneys were not entrusted to non-church agencies—the Roman Relief Agency or the Society for Feeding Hungry Jews.

Let's put this together to firmly secure the principles enumerated. The congregation prayerfully determined to receive a collection and how the funds received would be distributed. The determination to receive an offering was in response to the Spirit speaking through His servant. We could say that God proposes through His servant and the congregation prayerfully weighs what is recommended before approving the decision. The giving had a specific purpose, rather than simply generating moneys. Finally, the giving had the purpose of addressing the immediate need of fellow believers. Only when we have considered the needs of God's people should we imagine that we are responsible to care for the world at large. It would be fair to say that our first responsibility in acts of benevolence is to our fellow members, and then to Christians removed from us, and finally to address the broader needs of the world at large. In every case, the funds received are administered through the church and delivered to fellow believers.

Returning to the text, Jesus challenges us to consider both our motive for giving and God's response to our giving. Perhaps you think motive or response are unimportant, but Jesus would disagree. As He taught people on the side of a mountain that day long ago, He spoke of these precise truths as He urged those who listened to think of the implications.

Consider Your Motive in Giving. "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them." This should be terrifying to Christians, for the Master spoke in absolute terms: if we are generous with only a view to being noticed by others, we already have our reward! We sought recognition, and we got it. Under these circumstances, we dare not imagine that the Father will reward us for our kind deeds. This means that my life, ostensibly given to serve God, can in the final analysis count for nothing. Though I prayed for my enemies, though I was compassionate toward the sick and the destitute, though I gave to the point of impoverishing myself—my deeds merit no divine recognition if I acted for man's notice.

Jesus taught that it is possible to be an actor in giving. He used the term "hypocrites" to describe people who draw attention to themselves as they give. The term "hypocrite" is transliteration of a Greek word that referred to an actor. In Greek plays, actors wore masks. Whenever an actor put on a mask, he assumed the persona of the mask—he became a "hypocrite" so long as he wore the mask. Thus, the term came to identify someone who pretended to be someone other than who they actually were.

It is one thing for sinners who are lost to stand outside the church and condemn those who know God and who are known by God. We often hear people excuse their lack of faith by saying there are too many hypocrites in the church. Whenever I hear that, I usually tell the person, "Come on in. There's room for one more." However, Jesus allows that it is actually possible for a worshipper of the True and Living God to be hypocritical—to be an actor in the matter of giving (and by extension, to be hypocritical in matters of fasting and prayer). In fact, He points to the actions of individuals in the synagogues to make His point.

It is doubtful that people actually blew trumpets when they gave. Jesus was using hyperbole to make a point. What is true is that there were many people who were flamboyant, conspicuous, even ostentatious in performing their charitable acts. Thus, they were counterfeit and their giving was contrived. No doubt those who received the gifts were benefitted and they were grateful for whatever relief they received, but the entire action was a play. The one giving the gift was not concerned for the welfare of the person in need; or if the welfare of the needy individual was in view it was secondary. Gaining recognition for his generosity was the primary concern of the one giving the gift.

On a rather grandiose scale, we see this today when the great telethons are broadcast. Inevitably, the organisers of these events secure a celebrity to host the show because they know the presence of such a well-known individual will draw viewers. The star-studded line-up consists of household names to ensure viewership and a generous response. The amount pledged and given is trumpeted loudly so everyone will know how successful the show was. It is all very neat—money is raised donors are absolved of any further responsibility.

Even within the world of the Faith, the same thing happens. A bronze plaque on the organ names the generous benefactor who purchased the instrument for the congregation. An inscription in the front of the hymnal tells those who read who the donor was. Seminaries and colleges, relief agencies and mission organisations list the people who give, ranking them according to the amounts they have given—the President’s Circle for those who give at least \$5,000 per year; Patrons, naming those who give between \$2,500 and \$4,999; Sustaining Members who give between \$1,000 and \$2,499, and so forth. Their names are listed in the brochures that are sent out. Ostensibly, this is done to stimulate giving and to give recognition. The names will remain on the list until another year rolls around and new needs arise.

Brothers, such stimuli to giving should not be the norm among the churches of our Lord, but they are common and entirely acceptable in the estimate of many godly leaders. Does it not strike you as artificial to use such inducements to generate income for God’s work? Does it not seem that we ignore the teaching of the Master in doing such things?

I knew such a person in a former church. He did little to advance the cause of Christ; but he was expert in drawing attention to himself through giving gifts. He advanced himself as a leader of the congregation because of his generosity; but his giving was contrived and artificial. For instance, this man gave an electric hand dryer to the congregation, making sure that everyone knew that he gave it. Actually, the congregation couldn’t miss it as every time someone went to the washroom, the service was interrupted by the noise of that dryer. The gift wasn’t requested—it was imposed on the congregation.

This man considered himself a worship leader, and everyone knows that you can’t worship without an overhead projector. So, he gave an overhead projector to the church. Then, having given the gift, he insisted on controlling its use through compelling people to sing as he wanted them to sing. Thus, each week, though he was tone deaf, he would “lead worship,” flashing one new song after another as the congregation sat dazed by the novelty of the situation and he performed. No one quite knew what he was singing, but they certainly saw the words.

He became offended because the pastor removed him from serving as “worship leader.” Offended, he threatened to withdraw from the church. Meeting with the pastor and another church leader, the man insisted that the church would die. “I pay your salary,” he blustered to the pastor. The pastor was unmoved. “I’ll take my hand dryer,” he growled. That would prove to be a blessing. “I’ll take my projector,” he blustered. The pastor told him to get his things and leave. For years he had given; but it was all a show. He had no concern either for Christ or for His people. That man’s primary concern was that people saw his generosity and praised him. The man I am describing was not giving; he was buying.

Tragically, the man I just described is not exceptional in the world of the faithful. There are many such people occupying pews within the churches of our Lord. I am not suggesting that they are unsaved—God alone knows the heart. However, it is obvious that they are acting out a role to generate praise for themselves rather than seeking God’s glory. What is especially tragic is that they are unaware of what they are doing. If they are challenged, they will insist that they are serving God and not their own appetite for personal glory.

Consider the Reward for Giving. “Your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” Jesus says that we need to consider the reward that attends giving. The Master tells us that God takes note of our motive and that He is pledged to recompense us. The Apostle Paul has written, “He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way” [2 CORINTHIANS 9:10, 11]. Moreover, because God recompenses those who give in this manner, His goodness produces thanksgiving to Him who supplies our need.

I know that it is popular in the religious world to speak of giving in order to receive. However, the motive is wrong if we are focused on enriching ourselves. God is generous; however, He supplies for His people so that they in turn may be generous. Those who teach people to give in order that they might receive seem always to promote their own “ministry” as the worthy recipient of the gifts sought. I caution you on the basis of the Master’s words, it is possible to be an exceptionally generous Christian, providing bountiful gifts in exceptional proportion to what God has entrusted to you, and yet have no reward from the Father.

Look at the first verse again. “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.” Scope in on the word “reward.” The word actually implies “a recompense based upon what a person has earned and thus deserves.”⁷ Thus, implicit in this warning is the knowledge that God supplies what is needed in order that His people can continue to show themselves generous. However, if our motive is wrong, we already have our reward and need not anticipate that God will be generous toward us. We bought and received the praise we sought. On the other hand, God does generously supply the need of His people when they are generous.

Oswald J. Smith was long pastor of People’s Church of Toronto, Ontario. He was greatly used of God to lead that church to become one of the great missionary churches of the past century. As the newly installed pastor of that church, he was sitting on the platform when the ushers began to collect the faith promises for the coming year’s missionary program.

One of the ushers, as Smith himself said, “had the audacity to walk up to the platform” and hand him an envelope. He read on it: “In dependence upon God I will endeavour to give \$ _____ toward the missionary work of the church during the coming year.”

He had never seen such a thing before, and he began to protest inwardly. He was the pastor! He had a wife and a child to support, and on top of that, he was earning only twenty-five dollars a week. He had never given more than five dollars to missions at any one time previously, and that was only once. He remonstrated with the Lord, “Lord, I can’t do anything. You know I have nothing. I haven’t a cent in the bank. I have nothing in my pocket. Everything is sky-high in price.”

However, the Lord seemed to say, “I know all that. I know you have nothing in the bank and I know that you are receiving only twenty-five dollars a week.”

“Well, then,” said Smith, “that settles it.”

“No, it doesn’t,” responded, the Lord. “I am not asking you for what you have. I am asking you for a faith offering. How much can you trust me for?”

“I guess that’s different,” replied the intrigued pastor. “How much can I trust you for?”

“Fifty dollars.”

“Fifty dollars!” he exclaimed. “That’s two weeks salary! How can I ever get fifty dollars?”

⁷ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, **Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains** (United Bible Societies, New York, NY 1996) electronic edition

Nevertheless, God seemed to be making the matter clear, and with trembling hand, Oswald Smith signed his name and put the amount of fifty dollars on the envelope. He has written since that he still does not know how he paid it. He had to pray each month for four dollars, but God sent the money, and at the end of the year, not only had he paid the whole amount, but he had himself received such a blessing that he doubled the figure at the next year's missionary conference.

I must urge you to weigh the words of the text. Consider your giving. Are you responding to needs solely on an emotional basis; or are you seeking to glorify God? Of course, you cannot glorify God if you do not know Him. If you have no faith in the Son of God, you have no business giving in any case. Your first need is to receive the life that He offers so that you will have a proper motive to give.

This is the Word of the Lord that promises us life in Christ the Lord. "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." It is important to note that passage continues by giving a great promise, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" [**ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**].

May God grant you His mercy as you turn to Him in faith. May He instruct you and lead you to a generous life to the praise of His glory. Amen.