

The Gospel of Matthew

Title: Principals of Biblical Giving

Text: Matthew 6:1-4

Introduction: In our text today, we have a few points to address. The wrong way to give, the right way to give, and why you should give.

POINT 1 - BEWARE OF WRONG GIVING (VS. 1)

Proverbs 23:7a “**For as he thinks within himself, so he is.**” Those that give to be seen by men (vs. 1) are practicing their righteousness before men. They are wanting to be seen by men. **A story is told of an Eastern holy man who covered himself with ashes as a sign of humility and often sat at a street corner. When asked to have his photo taken, he would rearrange the ashes to give the best picture of humility and destitution¹.**

Practicing our good deeds before men shows our own hypocrisy. It’s rooted in pride, and we have to be on guard against such attitudes. You may not do as Jesus is speaking of here, but you may be sure and tell someone how you helped another out. 1 Timothy 4:1-2 “**But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means (speaking lies) of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron.**” Hypocrisy is endemic to fallen man. Isaiah 29:13 “**And the Lord said: Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men**” (ESV).

People doing things (works) to be noticed by men isn’t something new. Jesus used many ways to describe hypocrisy: leaven, whitewashed tombs, concealed tombs, tares amidst wheat, and wolves in sheep clothing. In New Testament times many made a living as “professional mourners.” They were paid to weep, wail, and tear garments at funerals. Often they would carefully tear at the seam to be sure and sew back and use again. When Jesus came to an official’s house whose daughter they assumed had died, he found this scene outside in Matthew 9:23 “**When Jesus came into the official’s house, and saw the flute-players and the crowd in noisy disorder.**” As you can see the hypocrisy to be seen by men for mourning, or giving or whatever, was a real issue of the day. And Jesus warned against doing such things.

I want to look at little closer at the word beware. It has a meaning of “*take heed, give heed, attend too.*” It is something to attend too, 1 Timothy 4:13 “**Until I come, give attention to the *public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.***” Everyone of us should give “attention” and “beware” of what we do, that it’s not for men, but for God. And this is the warning Jesus gave not to do their giving before men to be noticed by them. The Greek phrase for “**to be seen or noticed**” comes from a term where we get our English word “theater.” The word has in mind a spectacle to be gazed at. It’s a production, a play that’s not real but acting. Theatrical performances are

¹ John MacArthur New Testament Commentary, pp. 352

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portraying someone who they are not. And Jesus said your giving to be noticed by men is nothing more than a performance to be seen. It's not genuine or real.

Application: As a Christian our "alms" giving should be done without the notice of men. We don't need to tell others what we have done to help a family, friend or someone in need. Jesus addressed the attitude of giving, the heart matter of giving. And today we all need to look at that. So beware of wrong giving.

POINT 2 - BEWARE OF HOW YOU GIVE (VS. 2)

A Christian can give wrongly and be a hypocrite in his giving, and an unbeliever can masquerade as a believer. This text warns of both. Giving in our text or as the AV says "alms" is the actual act of giving to the poor or needy. If you give hypocritically to be noticed by men then you will lose rewards (vs. 1). Many of the traditions of the Pharisees had brought the idea of giving as a way to have sins forgiven, thus many thought it was easier for the rich to get into heaven because they could give more. 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 shows we can lose rewards, "each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." So here is the warning for the Christian, don't give to have a reward here, but one that is eternal. Praise and accolades of men vanish, but not the eternal rewards of God.

The reward for those who give to be noticed by men is the praise of men (vs. 2). This is what men sought was to be recognized as ones who gave much. The idea of a literal sounding of a trumpet doesn't have any historical evidence, but the idea is that wealthy men, not just Pharisees and scribes, attracted attention in the streets and synagogue when they presented their gifts.

So what's the reward for those who give for the notice of men? Well, that's it. When you seek to be noticed for your giving, the only reward is what men can give. In other words, you have lost your reward in heaven. Your honor is that which men can give. There are many Christian ministries that publish the names of those that give, they are sent some kind of plaques or other certificates. To have what you give be broadcast isn't giving quietly.

POINT 3 - HOW TO GIVE RIGHTLY (VS. 3)

Not letting your right hand know what the left is doing is a proverbial expression which referred to a spontaneous act with no special effort or show. In a normal day, the right hand was the primary hand. And a lot of actions didn't involve the left hand. The point is for the Christian is his giving should be done without any show or fan fare. Giving to those in need should be a part of the normal Christian life. In our daily lives as we see needs that we are able to help. The disciples carried a money bag, which was also used to give to the poor and needy (John 13:29). The issue is

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the attitude and spirit of the giving. When one gives pridefully to be noticed that is a wrong way to give. But when we give with in the right way we have a reward, eternal one, not a human one.

POINT 4 - THE COMMAND OF GIVING (VS. 3A, 4)

It is not a matter of “if” you give but “when”. And when is a verb *poieō* which means action. Giving has been a part of biblical history. I think it’s vital that we understand the biblical view of giving. Unfortunately, this has been distorted by charlatans in America and elsewhere. People are skeptic of giving as we see the begging and pleading for “seeds” or “faith seeds” being propagated from so called ministries.

There are two kinds of giving we see in Scripture. One is compulsory which is giving to governments. And the other is giving to God, voluntary. Tithes in the OT were not primarily gifts to God, but taxes for the funding of the national budget in Israel. Because Israel was a theocracy, the Levitical priesthood acted as the civil government. So the tithes (Leviticus 27:30-33) sorta a precursor to today’s income tax, and a second tithe was to fund national festivals (Deuteronomy 14:22-29). Smaller taxes were also imposed on the people by the law, where they were to leave the fallen or extra for the poor and strangers (Leviticus 19:9-10; Exodus 23:10-11). The actual amount that was required to be given often exceeded 20% and as some scholars point out is was about 23% on average. All other giving was voluntary, 1 Chronicles 29:9a “**Then the people rejoiced because they had offered so willingly.**”

To be biblical we aren’t commanded to tithe a fixed amount. The amount paid to the government in the USA is roughly equal to what Israelites paid. Our giving is voluntary. This doesn’t mean if you have a certain percent you give and have for years that it’s wrong. A fixed amount, given from the heart is God honoring. But what does the Bible say about giving in the NT? Cf. 2 Corinthians 9:6-7.

Giving is sacrificial. David said he wasn’t going to give at no cost, 1 Samuel 24:24 “**for I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing.**” Generosity isn’t measured in the size of the gift itself. Some give little in the amount form because they have little. Mark 12:41-44 “**And He sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, “Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on.”** Obviously this text does not mean you are to empty out your retirement and savings, but the point of the text is giving sacrificially defines you trust God more than what you have.

Giving has no relationship to a person’s possessions. In other words, a person who isn’t generous when he has little won’t be generous when he has a lot. Luke 16:10 “**He who is faithful in a very**

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little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much.” We really should be teaching children that giving when you have little is going to be carried over to adulthood. Giving is not a matter of how much money one has but of how much love and care is in the heart.²

Giving is demonstrated personally (cf. 2 Corinthians 9:7). True giving is done from a righteous and generous heart. Not from a legalistic standard of fixed amounts or percentages. If you give a certain amount that’s not legalism, if you do it out of willingness. 2 Corinthians 8:2 “that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.” The ESV renders it “their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.”

Giving to real needs. We see the early Christians who have generously to those who were in real need. Those who had become destitute because of persecution. Many lost jobs, income and homes simply because they were Christians. There have always been charlatans who manufacture needs and literally play on the backs of the poor to fund their lavish lifestyles. Nor are we to fund someone’s laziness. We are to be wise in our giving, 2 Thessalonians 3:10 “For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.” Encouraging laziness weakens the character of the person and wastes the Lord’s money. Being a good steward of the resources God gives you involves giving to real needs.

A few closing thoughts. What you have isn’t really yours. How one views their possessions, also views how they see God. If we love the temporal more than the eternal, our view is that God isn’t big and faithful. In the closing of vs. 4 we are told to give in “secret” not pridefully. We are to give with no through of recognition. What man doesn’t see God does. John MacArthur notes, “If we remember, God will forget, if we forget, God will remember. The point is to meet every need we possible can, and leave the bookkeeping to God.”

The Lord knows your heart today. He knows how you view what you have. He knows where your treasure is. Would you today commit to trusting Him with everything. When it comes to giving to the work of the church, the need of someone or something, would you be faithful to give quietly and without acknowledgment?

² The John MacArthur NT Commentary, pp. 359