



Private investments

In Matthew 6:3–4, Jesus says, *“Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly”* (NKJV). Jesus is teaching us to make our gifts and offerings a private investment, a transaction between us and God alone. In contrast to this, our Lord pointed out the hypocrites in the synagogue, because they wanted to be noticed by other men for their generosity, even going so far as to sound a trumpet to gather attention.

Of course, there are many ways of trying to be noticed by others that are less ostentatious. Certainly in a worship setting, people are not looking to see how much money we put in the offering plate. Yet the public setting itself calls for conformity to expressed (or unexpressed) expectations. Nearly everybody puts something in the offering plate. But how about in a private setting? Would we feel equally inclined at home to send an anonymous charitable gift to someone in need, or support a church cause simply because we know that on this occasion our contribution would please God? The question we should be asking ourselves is, Am I not satisfied in giving unless someone knows about it?

Yet it is not enough to avoid the praise of others. Jesus also says we must avoid all praise from oneself. If it is the right hand that extends the gift, the left hand must not be apprised of the deed (v. 3). It is possible to turn an act of mercy into an act of vanity, even while keeping others from knowing about it.

The value of an action is determined by our motive behind it. For instance, to give in order that we may be appreciated by others is simply to gratify our pride. Or to give to the poor simply because it is customary is merely an expression of common humanity. But if I contribute to a ministry or need so as to call no attention to myself, but only to God's great grace, then I am moved by love for God. *“He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord”* (Prov. 19:17).

This is the way of Christ, who lived in a spirit of uncalculating generosity and mercy, even to the point of giving his life for our salvation. Although he explained to his disciples why he came, his gift was a personal matter—a covenant—between himself and his Father alone.

Now here is the remarkable result of making private investments with God. When we are moved by such a conviction, our giving itself tends to be more selfless and generous.

The Macedonian Christians demonstrated the difference it makes. They actually gave more than Paul had expected, in spite of their poverty and trials. Where did the Macedonians come up with this sacrificial spirit? Second Corinthians 8:5 says, *“They first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.”*

Whatever our assets may be, when our hearts are moved by a personal interest in the glory of God, even the crumbs we have gathered under the table have a place in God's storehouse; for he is able to *“multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness”* (2 Cor. 9:10).

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