

This Is All You Get!

1) Take Care! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired, because then you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven. 2) When you give a gift to someone in need, don't shout about it as the hypocrites do – blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I assure you, they have received all the reward they will ever get. 3) But when you give to someone, don't tell your left hand what your right hand is doing. 4) Give your gifts in secret, and your Father, who knows all secrets, will reward you.

Matthew 6:1-4

In the church we enthusiastically preach the principle of Luke 6:3, "Give, and it will be given to you." We "claim" the promises of Proverbs 3:9-10, Malachi 3:10-12 and II Corinthians 9:6 regarding the reward for generosity. However, we conveniently avoid the truth of Matthew 6:1-4.

There's a scary principle here. It says that if we deliberately offer our gifts in a way that draws attention to ourselves, the attention we get is our total reward. Don't expect anything further from God – in spite of the promises. God had a signed check ready for us but we wrote "VOID" across the front of it. Read that again!

I was involved in a capital campaign for a Christian school some years back. Our success depended on the gifts of many, but there were, as is usually the case, several large donors. All of them wanted to be anonymous. No names engraved in stone. No plaques on doors. I am certain they would not have given otherwise. There is a deeply profound statement in that.

Interestingly, there were others who were ready to make a nice contribution but wanted public recognition. The board decided that they wouldn't do that, on the basis of the precedent set by the major donors and the principle of Matthew 6:1-4. We lost the gift. There is a deeply profound statement there as well. In the end the potential donors lost more than we did.

I cringe when I see donors' names emblazoned across a building of a Christian institution. I believe that when institutions invite that in order to motivate a donor, they cheat them of God's reward for the gift. Read Matthew 6:2b again.

Even if we didn't insist on having our name become high profile, it is risky business to set oneself up by allowing others to make a public display of our gift. The temptation to pride can be almost unbearable. Further, we can begin to define ourselves by our wealth. It becomes our identity. I Timothy 6:17-19 ought to be considered here.

Because of its eagerness to get money, the church has often been unwise in assigning honor to the affluent. There is an assumption that the wealth of a Christian is a mark of God's blessing. Sometimes it is. Sometimes it is not. There are many ways to attain wealth.

Even if prosperity is achieved in an honorable way, the ability to gain it is from God. The wealthy Christian is no freer to use his gift for pleasure or fame, than the gifted pastor is free to use his abilities in such a way.

If one truly has a Biblical sense of stewardship, he/she will recognize that wealth has merely been entrusted to them by God, to be used for His purposes. It is not their own. It has God's name on it, not theirs. That attitude will shape how it is received, held, and given.

Giving huge amounts should be the norm for Christians with wealth. If what they have is truly from God, it was entrusted to them to pass on. For His glory, not theirs. Give. And give more. And give again. Wherever God directs. And then do it again.

Generosity is measured by what we give in relation to what we have. One church I was part of had an annual Faith Promise Offering. We would fill out cards with our commitment for the next year. The cards were collected and the amounts read off. For several years the large amounts were held until the end, for special honor. Why? I protested. It was obvious where the large gifts came from and it was easier for them to give \$20,000 than for others to give \$200. We ought to give honor in the same way that God does. Don't forget the widow's mite!

Whenever we give with the desire to get recognition or respect, we have our full reward right there. God longs to reward us for our giving but we must do it His way.

There is a special joy in giving anonymously. In one church where I served we had envelopes that we could put cash in, and then put someone's name on it. We would drop it in the offering basket and the treasurer would give it to the person.* Quite a bit of love-money circulated across the church that way. It is amazing how much of an encouragement even \$10 can be to someone in need. The value is far greater than the dollar amount.

I am privileged to be close to a number of younger families whom God has entrusted with wealth. They know why He gave it to them. They don't live "high." They move easily among folks of more average means. They are "real," not pretentious. They just give and give and give. Quietly. God pours it in, they pour it out to their churches and to missions and ministries that God connects them with. His work is extended tremendously through them – probably more than through many churches.

There is a genuineness about their lives that escapes many rich folk. It is the "Amen!" of God. The mark of the Matthew 6:4 reward. Now *that* is true riches!

And let me tell you about the capital campaign at that little school. There was an awesome and widespread sense that God was in it. Utility companies did more than they originally said they could. A man we bought some building materials from, who had no other connection with the school, came back with a nice gift. He said, "There's something going on here and I want to be part of it." No man or woman's name rose to the surface. It was a God-thing. An overwhelming success financially and a profoundly spiritual experience. It was marked by His presence. He delights in doing that as we walk in His ways!

*Don't worry, it wasn't "run through the church" as a tax-deductible gift, but God's reward is better than Uncle Sam's anyway!

Born in 1940, Ken Stoltzfus has worked as a pilot, ordained Christian minister, businessman, missionary to Africa and writer. This is #8 in his series "Snippets from the Good Book", and is one of many short articles that can be found at www.John2031.com

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