

## THE CHRISTIAN SALT AND LIGHT COMPANY - Studies In The Sermon On The Mount –

Part eleven - Teaching #1776 - Sunday, January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2015, 6:00 p.m.

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### THE ART OF THE HEART (studies in how to give a gift)

**Matthew 6:1-4** - "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. [2] 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. [3] But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, [4] so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

#### 1) PRACTICAL LOVE IN THE BODY OF CHRIST IN A WORLD WITHOUT SOCIAL AID

It's important for us to remember that these words were spoken into a world where the poor had no recourse other than the generosity of the more fortunate. This gave the church both a **responsibility** and a **golden opportunity** to demonstrate the love of God in a way that would stand out sharply from the coldness of others - **Matthew 5:14-16** - "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. [15] Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. [16] In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Ironically, we have been largely outstripped in this area today by totally secular (though God-given) institutions. The primary **difference** in this institutional approach is the **will of the giver** has been largely bypassed through the redistribution of wealth through various forms of taxation. Certainly this **does** help those in need, but the **spiritual component** for the giver is at least minimized.

***The challenge for the disciple is to so practice generosity as though he were the only one caring for the poor.*** It is interesting that this is the **very first example** of "**practicing our righteousness**" mentioned in this sixth chapter - **Matthew 6:1-2** - "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. [2] 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."

Jesus clearly expected this kind of giving to be one of the first **birthmarks** of the disciples' heart And it carried over in the early church:

**Acts 4:32-35** - "Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. [33] And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. [34] There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold [35] and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."

Could the success of their evangelism find part of its root in the generous giving of the people?

#### 2) HUMAN GLORIFICATION DOES NOT WORK DIVINE GLORY IN THE CHURCH OR IN OUR HEARTS

There is a test for the authenticity of our acts of righteousness: If our minds are concerned about the praise of men we will never be capable of glorifying God. The desire for **recognition from men** chokes the spiritual benefit and the glory of God out of our hearts. Jesus made the same point in **John 5:44** - "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?"

Notice that the **true exercise of faith** and the **desire of praise from men** cannot co-exist in the same heart. Jesus saw the desire for recognition as a **pollutant to kingdom life**. Other sinful acts **stained the heart with guilt and required repentance**. But the desire of recognition **crept into even the most holy deeds of life and rendered repentance unlikely because true repentance depends upon the ultimate concern of God's glory, rather than self's promotion**. In other words, this proud sin described by Jesus in our text is so dangerous because it is so self-deceiving. It doesn't **tend** toward repentance.

And there's a reason for that. The lack of recognition from others when I do something good creates a **bitterness** against the one **not giving** me that recognition. And I will usually **express** my frustration as being **unappreciated**. This has the effect of putting the fault on those failing to appreciate me rather than exposing

my desire for **recognition**. And that makes my **repentance** for my hunger for recognition an almost impossible.

### 3) RIGHT HAND AND THE LEFT

**Matthew 6:3-4** - "But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, [4] so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

It seems there are two different thoughts in these words of Jesus. He is shooting at **two dangers that can pollute acts of righteousness**:

- a) **First, there is the warning of giving to the needy with the motive of self-demonstration**. Trumpets were sounded when gifts were presented in the temple. People offering big gifts could make the most of their time in the spotlight. Jesus hated this kind of "Disney-Land" giving.
- b) **Second, we can give with the purpose of self-justification**. Not only should I not maximize publicity when I give before others, but I also shouldn't **magnify my gift in my own mind**. It's my **own** left hand that shouldn't know what the right hand is giving.

It is particularly easy to **rest in my spirituality** when I'm bragging to my own heart - "**I must be a pretty decent fellow to care so much for the needs of others. I doubt that others are doing as much!**" This is the surest way **both** to lose any reward for what I have done **and** to **silence the voice of the Spirit in other areas of neglect or failure**.

In other words, I shouldn't use the fact that I give large sums of money to the church, or missions, or the needy, to make me think that this somehow **compensates** for pride, anger, bitterness, or lack of growth in other areas in my heart. My money doesn't buy me shares in God's Kingdom. The less I congratulate myself, the more I allow the Lord to honor my gifts in deeper, personally fruitful, and more permanent ways.

### 4) WHEN THE GIFT IS KEPT PRIVATE, GOD SEES AND REWARDS

**Matthew 6:4** - "...so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you." Our invisible God has an affinity for invisible deeds. When we have made no attempt to promote our giving, and when we have not used our act of giving to justify or deceive our own heart, **we can be sure that God will both see and reward our actions**.

The Father is impressed with spiritual, hidden generosity. Jesus said so. In fact, Jesus felt it was **important His disciples knew their hidden acts of giving were noticed by the Father**. He **used** the doctrine of rewards many times in His teaching.

The Apostle Paul used the very same doctrine to combat the power of **revenge** in our hearts - **Romans 12:18-19** - "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. [19] Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'"

Our Lord remembered this future oriented mind-set in His own life during times of difficulty and suffering - **Hebrews 12:1-2** - "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [2] looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

We needn't try to be more spiritual than Jesus. Remember and live in the power of **future** reward. This, not an empty head, is the true antidote to the false enticement of the present applause of others. There is nothing wrong with our desire for recognition. Our problem is we **seek recognition in the wrong place**. We set our hearts on short-term applause from others when we are told to aim higher. **We are to seek the Divine smile and reward from our Heavenly Father**.

In other words, our sin is not that we seek rewards for what we do. Our sin is being earthbound in our search for gratification. Jesus tells us four times in eighteen verses to look for eternal rewards. **Nothing properly done goes unnoticed**. And Jesus said we are never to forget that.