

How open should we be in our giving?

I would like to thank Brother Tony Benson for his [editorial](#) in the December issue, but I was prompted by his comment regarding our giving, "The extent to which it is done remains hidden, for giving should never be done to be seen of others, as Jesus warned (Mt. 6:1-4)", to write regarding the 'openness' of our giving. Whilst we would all agree that giving should be done quietly and unobtrusively, shrouding the act in secrecy denies our ecclesial community the benefit of positive modelling and witness.

The collection for the saints in Jerusalem, referred to by Brother Benson, seems to have met with somewhat mixed results. The brethren in Corinth appear to have required additional prompting from Paul to donate generously. Indeed, perhaps to prick their collective conscience, he wrote to them about the generosity of their brethren in Macedonia, who, despite real poverty, "urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints" (2 Cor. 8:4).^{*} Paul realised that there was value in providing the Corinthian brethren with a positive ecclesial example to emulate when it came to giving.

It is certainly true that those who do their "acts of righteousness" before men, because they seek the honour and acclaim of their peers, already have their reward, and that God will reward those who give quietly, not telling anyone (Mt. 6:1-4). Motive is at the heart of the matter. Just as all prayer is not in secret, neither should all giving be. The operative phrase is, "to be seen by them" (v. 1). This is not a prohibition against others becoming aware of our "acts of righteousness"; rather it is a command not to do these things in order that we receive the recognition of men.

Flaunting one's 'generosity' is never appropriate, but sometimes our giving will be seen by others and can serve as a witness to our faith. Jesus said that believers' love for one another would serve as a testimony to all men that they were indeed his disciples (Jno. 13:35). To serve as a witness to those round about, such acts of love would need to be known. We are exhorted to let our lights shine before men, that they may see our good deeds and glorify our Father in heaven (Mt. 5:16). Giving to gain personal recognition, though, loses sight of the reality that we are merely stewards of our Lord's resources.

Positive examples of giving to glorify God can be a source of encouragement to the faithful. In 1 Chronicles 29 we have recorded David's challenge to Israel as the materials were being assembled for the construction of the temple. His appeal to the people was based upon his own generous giving. He presented himself as a positive model for them to follow. As a consequence of his public example, the leaders of the people also gave willingly, the Scripture listing their contributions. Thus "The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the LORD" (v. 9).

Certainly the brethren in Jerusalem who sold their possessions and gave to the needy, as recorded in Acts 2:45, would be known to the others. Some givers are even named for our benefit. As recorded in Acts 4:36,37, Barnabas sold a field and laid the money at the apostles' feet. His act of generosity would have been commonly known and was publicly and permanently recorded. Sadly, Ananias and Sapphira gave for the wrong reasons, but the possibility of abuse doesn't negate the principle. Christ's ecclesia can benefit from seeing open examples of generous giving.

When the widow placed her two mites into the temple treasury, she did so publicly; Jesus could actually see the two coins. And he used her as a public illustration to his disciples. It was appropriate that the people were told the exact amount of her gift. Her motives were right. The public disclosure did nothing to nullify her good heart and the efficacy of her gift.

How do young brothers and sisters in our ecclesias learn how to give? Where can they go to see what giving looks like in the life of a faithful believer? Is it surprising that, when there is no visible role model, they take their cues from our materialistic society, steeped in avarice? Have we failed as a community to provide a vision of giving by keeping it hidden? I appreciate that this can be a fine balance. Perhaps the answer lies in citing others' generosity, rather than our own (Prov. 27:2).

We are exhorted to "spur one another on towards love and good deeds" (Heb. 10:24). If we are not able to discuss our communal giving openly and humbly, how can we expect to raise up a generation of givers?

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* Quotations from the NIV.