

## THE DYNAMICS OF CHRISTIAN GENEROSITY

### LUKE 6:37-38

An IRS auditor investigated a man who report a small income but claimed to have given a significant percentage away in charitable donations. "Have you a receipt from your church," the agent asked, trying to make the man squirm. "Sure," replied the man, providing the documentation. When the papers were reviewed, it was clear this man was on the level. He apologized for the inconvenience and explained that he had to check deductions that seem unusually high. After the meeting, the man invited the agent to church. The agent said, "Thanks, but I belong to a church myself." "Oh, excuse me," replied the man, "that possibility never occurred to me." As the agent drove home, he wondered what the man meant by that last remark. It was not until Sunday, when the agent put his usual dollar in the offering, that the meaning became clear.

Indeed, people have the right to question your profession of faith if you are not a generous person. For that matter, the absence of generosity should cause you to examine your faith in Christ, love for Christ, and devotion to Christ. To be a sincere, faithful, and mature Christian is to live with generosity. That is the point Jesus makes in Luke 6:37-38. These two verses are a part of THE SERMON ON THE PLAIN, recorded in Luke 6:20-49. This discourse is so called because verse 17 says Jesus was on "a level place." It is a similar or shorter version of THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT recorded in Matthew 5-7. THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT addresses the righteousness of citizens of the kingdom of heaven. THE SERMON ON THE PLAIN addresses the relationships kingdom citizens.

- Verses 20-26 deal with our relationship to material possessions.
- Verses 27-45 deal with our relationship to other people.
- Verses 46-49 deal with our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The key verse of this discourse is verse 36: "*Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*" WARREN WIERSBE is right: "It is an awesome thought that when I show mercy, I am practicing one of the attributes of God." Jesus commands his followers to imitate the mercy of God. Luke 6:37-38 expounds on this call to mercy with four dynamics of Christian generosity.

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## I. THE PRIORITY OF CHRISTIAN GENEROSITY

You grossly misinterpret Luke 6:38 if only think of it in terms of money. This verse is an emphatic call to generosity. But it is the last of four parallel commands. Verse 37 says, "*Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven.*" Then verse 38 says, "*Give, and it will be given to you.*"

The connection of these four commands and the fact that the command to give is given after three relational commands teach us the priority of Christian generosity: PEOPLE MATTER TO GOD MORE THAN POSSESSIONS. Your relationships are God-given just as much as your others resources. Christians must practice moral generosity as well as material generosity. In Matthew 23:23, Jesus says, "*Woe to you,*

*scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.*" Giving to the church without concern for others is religious hypocrisy. Before Jesus says anything about giving in this text, he discusses the priority of Christian generosity: our relationships.

Verse 37 says, *"Judge not, and you shall not be judged."* The word "judge" described the judicial process by which a person was tried, convicted, and punished. Jesus uses this legal term here to say, "You must not act as if you are judge and jury over other people." James 4:11-12 says, *"Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?"* Of course, this injunction against judging is not absolute. We should not be gullible, undiscerning, and permissive. Verse 43 says, *"For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit."* That statement calls us to judge between good trees and bad trees, good fruit and bad fruit. Verse 44 says, *"For each tree is known by its own fruit."*

Jesus does not forbid all judging. He forbids self-righteous, arrogant, and hypocritical faultfinding that impugns motives or assassinate character. This prohibition against judging is in a grammatical emphasis that forbids an act that is already in progress. Literally, Jesus says, "Stop judging other people." And Jesus attaches a promise to this prohibition: If you stop judging others, you will not be judged. This promise does not mean the one who does not judge will not have to answer to God in judgment. Hebrews 9:27 says: *"it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment."* The one who does not judge will not have to stand in judgment with fear. In Matthew 5:5, Jesus says, *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."*

Likewise, verse 37 says, *"Condemn not, and you will not be condemned."* The word "condemn" is also a legal term, closely connected to the word "judge." It carries both legal and moral connotations. It is the act of sentencing a person who has been determined a wrongdoer. The opposite of condemn is to acquit. JOHN BENGEL writes, "By judging, we decide on the goodness or badness of an action; by condemning, we determine as to persons, what the guilty deserves." Jesus forbids judgmental attitudes and censorious treatment that seek to put others in their place based on our small-minded view of them. In John 8, a naked, screaming woman was drug to the feet of Jesus. The religious leaders stood over her and announced, "We caught her in the act of adultery. The Law of Moses commands us to stone her. What do you say?" Jesus wrote on the ground and declared, *"Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her"* (8:7). On by one, the crowd dispersed. Jesus looked up and said, *"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"* "She said, "No one, "Lord." And Jesus said, *"Neither do I condemn you; go and from now on sin no more."*

This is the heart of the ministry of Jesus. John 3:16-17 says, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."* Romans 8:1 assures all who

trust Christ for salvation: *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* It is only right that Jesus commands those he delivers from condemnation not to condemn others. Again, Jesus attaches a promise to the prohibition: If you stop condemning others, you will not be condemned. In Luke 6:31 Jesus issues THE GOLDEN RULE: *“And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.”* There is no parallel teaching to this in all of antiquity. Many ancients taught that one should not do to others what one does not want to be done to him. Jesus took this common instruction and filled it with radical implications by shifting it from the negative to the positive. Jesus teaches that the good things you want other people to do to you, do it to them first.

After forbidding attitudes and conduct that does not imitate the mercy of God the Father, Jesus says, *“Forgive, and you shall be forgiven.”* The word *“forgive”* means to send away. It was used for loosing the bonds of a captive to let him go or to acquitting one accused of a crime and setting him free or releasing a debtor and not pressing a claim against him. It was even used to the act of divorcing a mate and putting them out of the house. Jesus uses it here to call on us to let go of bitterness against those who have hurt, wronged, or offended us; rather than judging or condemning. Ephesians 4:32 says, *“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”*

Jesus promises that forgivers will be forgiven. Matthew 6:14-15 puts it this way: *“For if you forgive men their trespasses, our heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”* In Matthew 18:21-35, Jesus responds to a question about forgiveness by telling of a king who forgave a servant that owed a debt he could not repay. That servant later ran into another servant who owed him a fraction of what he owed. But this servant had no mercy on his fellow servant. When the king heard it, he withdrew his forgiveness, treating the unmerciful servant the way he chose to treat others. Jesus concludes the parable in Matthew 18:35: *“So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”* Jesus calls us to be nonjudgmental, non-condemning, and forgiving, before he calls us to give. The priority of Christian generosity puts people before possessions.

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## II. THE PRACTICE OF CHRISTIAN GENEROSITY

STEPHEN OLFORD rightly said, “Giving satisfies the soul, edifies the church, and magnifies the Lord.” Therefore, it should be no surprise that the primary command in this call to generosity is the imperative that is strategically placed as the first word of verse 38: *“Give.”* It means to give something to someone of your own accord. That is an obvious definition. But it is a needed reminder that you have not given if you have to be begged, forced, pushed, bribed, or manipulated to do it. And you have not given if your primary concern is what you may get in return. That is not generosity. It is negotiation. True generosity gives willingly.

**A wise man came to the aid of a needy traveler. In the process, he opened his small pouch of belongings and offered the man a precious stone worth a small fortune. The traveler was amazed at his good fortune and quickly left to sell the valuable stone. But the man returned a few days later with the valuable jewel. He placed it in the wise man's hand and said, "Now please give me something much more precious than this stone. Please give me that which enabled you to give it away."**

That traveler understood a fundamental fact about generosity that many of us fail to understand: TRUE GENEROSITY STARTS IN THE HEART, NOT IN THE BANK ACCOUNT. Mark 12:41-44 tells of a widow who offered two mites, which together was worth less than a penny. Jesus commended the widow, rather than others who gave large amounts, because generosity is not about the amount of the gift. It is about the willingness of the heart. 2 Corinthians 8:12 says, *"For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have."*

Jesus commands us to willingly give. On the surface, it seems contradictory to command us to do something willingly. But Jesus is not commanding us to do something, as much as he is commanding us to be generous people who are willing to give. This command is in the present tense, which denotes habitual action. Jesus is not just calling us to perform an act. He is calling us to embrace a lifestyle. Notice the intentional ambiguity with which this call to generosity is issued. Jesus commands us to give. But he does not tell us who to give to, what to give, or where it should be given. He just says give. It is an all-encompassing call to generosity.

Mark it down. Just because you liberally share your material possessions with others does not necessarily mean you are a generous person. To the contrary, you can give your money to buy people off, protect your selfishness, and keep from having to give things that really count; like your time, concern, or service. Have you ever noticed there is no record of Jesus giving money to people who were in need? All of the riches of the world were at his disposal. Yet when the poor and the hungry came to him, Jesus did not give them money. And he rarely gave them food. Instead, Jesus gave them love, service, time, and the greatest gift of all – himself. In Mark 10:45 Jesus says, *"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Let me be very clear: God wants you to give money. He wants you to give it cheerfully, intentionally, locally, proportionately, regularly, sacrificially, voluntarily, worshipfully, and quietly. But the fact that you faithfully pay tithes and regularly give offerings is not an excuse to cop-out of your personal responsibility to Christian service. In describing the generosity of the churches of Macedonia, in 2 Corinthians 8:3-5, Paul says, *"For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God."* That is the heart of Christian generosity: Give yourself! Give yourself to God first. Then you will not have any problem giving your material resources.

### III. THE PROMISE OF CHRISTIAN GENEROSITY

The command to give in verse 38 is the primary point of this call to generosity. This is signified in verse 38, where the command to give goes beyond the parallel form of the previous commands. There are four imperatives in these two verses, each with a corresponding promise: *“Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it shall be given to you.”* The promises related to judgment, condemnation, and forgiveness are narrow. Either you are judged or you are not. Either you are condemned or you are not. Either you are forgiven or you are not. But the promise to those who give is not just reciprocal. It is lavish, plentiful, and abundant. Verse 38 says, *“Give, and it shall be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom.”*

In the ancient Near East, people wore robes. When they walked or worked, they pulled up the hem of their robe and stuck it into their belt, creating a pouch to carry goods. When they went to the market to get grain, they put it in that pouch. Then they pressed or pack it down, to make room for more. Then they would shake it together, to make room for even more. When they finished this process, there was so much grain in their pouch that their bosom was running over as they traveled along the way. Jesus used that common occurrence to illustrate the promise of abundance God will bestow upon those who give generously. Here’s the point:

- **You can’t beat God giving!**
- **He will never allow himself to be out-given.**
- **The Lord will always make sure that he more generous with you than you are with him.**
- **Those who give generously are rewarded generously.**

**R.G. LETOURNEAU, an inventor of earthmoving machines, understood this** promise. He was so confident in God’s faithfulness that he reached a place in his life where he was giving 90% of his income to the Lord. When asked how he was able to sustain such a high level of generosity, he replied, “I shovel out the money, God shovels it back – but God has a bigger shovel.” He was right. God has a much bigger shovel than you do. He is ready, able, and willing to reward your generosity by giving back to you good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over. Proverbs 3:9-10 says, *“Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.”* Malachi 3:10 says, *“Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house, and try Me now in this, says the Lord of hosts, ‘If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.’”* 2 Corinthians 9:7-8 says, *“So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.”*

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## IV. THE PRINCIPLE OF CHRISTIAN GENEROSITY

There are three kinds of givers – the flint, the sponge, and the honeycomb. To get anything out of a flint you must hammer it. Even then, you only get chips and sparks. To get water from a sponge you must squeeze it. The more pressure you use, the more you will get. The honeycomb overflows with its own sweetness. What kind of giver are you? That's an important question in light of the proverbial principle that ends verse 38 and climaxes this call to generosity: *"For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."* The way you give to others is the way you will receive in return. The standard you use for others will be applied to you. EUGENE PETERSON'S *The Message* paraphrase reads: "Generosity begets generosity."

James 1:17 says, *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning."* The goodness of God is sovereign, purposeful, transcendent, infinite, and unchanging. Yet there is a real sense in which God allows you to choose how you want him to treat you. It is a mystery that is beyond us. But in a real sense, you can either release or restrain God's hand of favor, blessing, and goodness in your life, based on your own generosity with the resources he entrusts to you. A certain man dreamed God spoke to him, promising to take the amount of his weekly offering, multiply it by ten, and make that his weekly income. The man woke up with terror, not joy. God's generous promise was a terrorizing threat because he knew there was no way he would be able to live on \$10 a week. You should not expect the Lord to speak to you in dreams. You should expect the Lord to speak to you through his word. And his word says, *"For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."*

When you live with a closed hand, nothing gets away. Nothing gets in, either. The hand that gives gathers. This is not prosperity theology. This is not "Name-it-and-Claim-it." This is not positive confession. It is the word of God. Psalms 37:25-26 says, *"I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lends; and his descendants are blessed."* Ecclesiastes 11:1-2 counsels, *"Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days. Give a serving to seven, and also to eight, for you do not know what evil will be on the earth."* 2 Corinthians 9:6 records these words: *"But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."* The question is often asked, "Should I tithe off of my net or gross income?" The wise answer is simply, which do you want God to bless, the net or the gross?" *"For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."* If I can say it the way I like to say it, "If you take care of God's business, God will take care of your business."<sup>4</sup>

**I'll close when I tell you about a missionary who got an unexpected visitor at his hut on Sunday afternoon. It was one of the little boys of the village. And he was carrying a rather large fish. He said to the missionary, "I went fishing this afternoon, and I remembered what you taught us today about tithing. So here I am to bring you my tithe." The missionary graciously took the fish, but asked, "If this is your tithe, where**

are your other nine fish?" With a big smile, the boy said, "They're still in the river. I'm going to go catch them now."

YOU HAVE LONGED FOR SWEET PEACE AND FOR GRACE TO INCREASE  
YOU HAVE EARNESTLY, FERVENTLY PRAYED  
BUT YOU CANNOT HAVE REST OF BE PERFECTLY BLEST  
UNTIL ALL ON THE ALTAR IS LAID.

WOULD YOU WALK WITH THE LORD IN THE LIGHT OF HIS WORD,  
AND HAVE PEACE AND CONTENTMENT ALWAYS?  
YOU MUST DO HIS SWEET WILL TO BE FREE FROM ALL ILL –  
ON THE ALTAR YOUR ALL YOU MUST LAY.