

December 2007—*On Giving*

Few things in life reveal our hearts as do our attitude toward and practice of giving away our money, especially giving it to the poor. Our giving shows in concrete form what we love most—our own comfort and security or fellow human beings in pressing need. It also shows what we trust most. As C.S. Lewis notes, our giving to and caring for those most in need “seems to be the point on which everything turns” at the final judgment (Matt. 25:31-46). This is so precisely because these deeds reveal the presence or absence of true saving faith.

Lewis was a generous giver, especially to the poor, and gives us wise counsel in this matter:

In the passage where the New Testament says that every one must work, it gives as a reason “in order that he may have something to give to those in need.” Charity—giving to the poor—is an essential part of Christian morality: in the frightening parable of the sheep and the goats it seems to be the point on which everything turns. Some people nowadays say that charity ought to be unnecessary and that instead of giving to the poor we ought to be producing a society in which there were no poor to give to. They may be quite right in saying that we ought to produce this kind of society. But if anyone thinks that, as a consequence, you can stop giving in the meantime, then he has parted company with all Christian morality. I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc. is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charities expenditure excludes them. I am speaking now of “charities” in the common way. Particular cases of distress among your own relatives, friends, neighbors or employees, which God, as it were, forces upon your notice, may demand much more: even to the crippling and endangering of your own position. For many of us the great obstacle to charity lies not in our luxurious living or desire for more money, but in our fear—fear of insecurity. This must often be recognized as a temptation. Sometimes our pride also hinders our charity; we are tempted to spend more than we ought on the showy forms of generosity (tipping, hospitality) and less than we ought on those who really need our help.¹

Do you give money to help the poor and seek ways to serve those in need? Perhaps those of us who live in the richest country in the history of the world would do well to consider our care and giving to the poor. How much of our income should we give to God’s work? In the law of the Old Testament, the minimum was 10 percent; under grace, surely it would not be less. As we step out in faith, trusting God’s provision for us and cheerfully giving to the needs of others, we can be assured that he will take care of us.

2 CORINTHIANS, CHAPTERS 8 AND 9

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), pp. 82-83.