

Almsgiving

By Paul R. Blake

Introduction:

- A. Luke 12:32-33; Acts 10:1-4
- B. "Alms? What are alms? Is that sort of like footwashing? You know... old Bible stuff nobody does anymore?"
- C. Quickly, tell me about almsgiving among Christians today; how do we do it?
 - 1. "Giving on Sunday?" No
 - 2. "Is it paying my taxes, and the government takes care of the poor?" No
 - 3. "Giving to a charity?" No
- D. Not going to spend time talking about giving of our means.
 - 1. This congregation does very well for its size and economic makeup; we have not found ourselves in serious need, and our offering increases yearly, often to our surprise given the current economy.
 - 2. Not talking about benevolent works addressed on an individual basis; you astonish me.
 - a. Private efforts - shock to be handed an envelope with hundreds of dollars and told to find someone here who can use it
 - b. Public efforts - Zimbabwe Relief - \$900.00 to people on the other side of the world you will not likely meet in this life.
 - c. Over \$2900.00 to tornado victims in Joplin, MO
 - 3. There is no need to preach on giving alms. But I will leave this point with the apostolic and inspired instruction to the Thessalonians
 - a. 1Thes. 4:9-10
- E. All New Testament practices have some application or instruction for contemporary Christians
 - 1. What are alms?
 - 2. How do I practice almsgiving in the 21st century?

I. WHAT ARE ALMS?

- A. It's not about the money, the amount or the duration of its use
 - 1. Because we tend to think a bit materially, we are inclined to think of giving in terms of money
 - 2. In the Old Testament, giving was regulated by the tithe, but its entire purpose was about glorifying God - Psalm 96:7-8
 - 3. In the New Testament, giving is about many things, but instructions about the amount are conspicuous by their absence. Instead, giving in the context of alms and benevolence is about
 - a. Fellowship, manifested by sharing
 - b. Love for others, manifested by giving
 - c. Glorifying God, manifested by the seed principle
 - d. Spreading the gospel, manifested by God's grace in enabling them to give
 - e. 2Cor. 8:1-6, 9:8-14

B. It's not about me

1. The English word "alms" is an abridged form of the Greek word, eleemosune
 - a. The Jews viewed almsgiving as one of the great works of righteousness
 - b. Deut. 15:11
 - c. According to Rabbi Assi, "Almsgiving is a powerful paraclete between the Israelites and their Father in heaven, it brings the time of redemption nigh (Talmud 10a).
2. Jesus took the Jewish standard of alms and raised it higher
 - a. Matt. 5:20, 6:1 - Three examples of this:
 - 1) Almsgiving - Matt. 6:2-4
 - 2) Prayer - Matt. 6:5-15
 - 3) Fasting - Matt. 6:16-18
 - b. Do these things individually and as quietly as possible
3. Almsgiving is about stewardship
 - a. Matt. 25:14 - Parable of the stewards is about stewardship, not about amounts of revenue generated, could have been toads
 - b. The talents didn't belong to them; they were given them to use on the master's behalf
 - c. "I was afraid!" "No, you were wicked and lazy."
 - d. God didn't give you what you have for you; He gave it to you for you to distribute it on His behalf
 - e. "Here Lord, I took good care of the house you gave me, and the truck, etc." "Was it hot when you took care of those things? Not as hot as it's gonna be!" "But Lord, I built bigger barns to store what you gave me!" "You can't take it with you because it will burn up."
 - f. You don't even own your body - 1Cor. 6:19-20
4. Do we understand yet?
 - a. 1Chron. 29:11-12, 29:14; Luke 6:38

C. It's about God

1. It is not, "Here, I am giving you this."
2. It is, "Here, God sent me to give this to you."
3. To understand alms, we must understand:
 - a. It all belongs to God
 - b. It was not given to me for my exclusive comfort, but I hold it as a servant and a steward
 - c. It is not about something as limited and small as money, but demands a commitment of our entire being
4. No wonder the rabbis believed almsgiving was one of the three great righteousnesses, and no wonder Jesus said that our righteousness must exceed that of the Jews

5. What things constitute alms?
 - a. Money is just one of many things.
 - b. Time, work, attention, energy, resources, moving out of your comfort zone, taking a loss for someone else's gain, just as Jesus did for us
 - c. Alms are good deeds done in behalf of God to others at our expense
- D. Do you understand why Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive?
 1. Alms encourage unselfishness within us.
 2. Alms brings others needed relief and encouragement.
 3. Alms force us out of our own narrow world.
 4. Alms keep us from becoming too attached to material things.
 5. Alms model the life Christ lived.
 6. Alms result in eternal rewards.
 7. Alms teach us the value of servanthood.
 8. Alms make us more cheerful, caring people.
 9. Alms prompt greater sensitivity toward others.
 10. Alms provide an example for others to follow.

Conclusion:

- A. If the brother who makes the closing comments says that brother Blake preached a good lesson about giving to the needy, I am telling you right now that he didn't listen to the sermon.
- B. Almsgiving is about giving ourselves to God and then to others by His will
 1. 2Cor. 8:5