Generosity

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**Why should we give?**
We might ask instead, "Why should we not give?" We often assume that money exists for our own benefit, rather than for God or others. Pastor Andy Stanley tells a story about a little boy who was scolded by his mother because he refused to share his lunch with a classmate who had brought no lunch to school that day. The ironic point, Stanley says, is that we expect our children to know that possessions are for sharing, yet when it comes to our own affairs, we act as if possessions are for keeping. But why else, according to the Bible, should we give? First, we should give because it is a reasonable response to all God has done. Because God has shown such great mercy to His people by sending Christ to suffer in our place, it is fitting that we should offer ourselves as sacrifices to Him (Romans 12:1) and specifically in part by giving our money (2 Corinthians 8:8-9). Generous giving is an act of Christian worship. Second, we should give to show the genuineness of our Christian confession. Many people say they know Jesus, but those who really know Him show it by their lives, especially by their generosity (Matthew 25:31-46). When we give to the Lord, we put our money where our mouth is, so to speak. Third, we should give because the Lord Jesus (Luke 12:33) and His apostles (2 Corinthians 8:7) command us to give. Christian giving is certainly much more than a duty, but the biblical commands are unavoidable. Fourth, if specific instruction from the Scriptures were not enough, we should give because God promises to reward us for doing so (Luke 12:33). As it turns out, to give is not to throw money away, but rather to invest it for a staggering return. The Bible is certainly not lacking for reasons that we should give. Why would we not give?

**What is a generous giver?**
When we think of generosity, we might look at the size of the gift or the nobility of the cause. We might call someone "generous," for example, who contributes a modest sum to a charitable cause to promote the good of society. But Jesus measured generosity by a radically new standard: the condition of the giver's heart. The apostle Paul said that even the most lavish donations are empty acts in God's sight if the giver's heart is hardened toward Him (1 Corinthians 13:3). So a truly generous giver is, first of all, a person who has been reconciled to God through faith in Christ, whose perfect life and sacrificial death can generously free any person from sin. Once this gospel works its way deep into that person's heart and mind, the stage is set for a new person to emerge: a generous giver. Such a person is characterized by several particular attitudes and behaviors: (1) A generous giver experiences the joy of giving. When he gives, it does not feel like a burden but a pleasure. (2) A generous giver lives and gives with an eternal perspective. He is unconcerned with how much he owns in this life because his attention is on the age to come. (3) A generous giver models the proverb, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35b). He not only believes these words of Jesus, but he actually prefers giving over getting, so that he regularly chooses to give more and receive less. (4) A generous giver recognizes that God owns everything. He does not cling to possessions because he does not believe that he truly owns them anyway. His goal is to put God's money where God wants it. (5) A generous giver offers gifts as an act of worship. His driving motivation is neither self-concern nor love for others, but love for God. The most important truth in his life is God's saving love in Christ, and he gives in order to thank and to honor his God.

**How much am I required to give?**
The short answer is 100 percent. Jesus said that anyone who does not give up all of his possessions cannot be His disciple (Luke 14:25-35). At the same time, we recognize that God graciously lets us use and enjoy some of the material resources that He entrusts into our care (e.g., Numbers 14:8; 26:53-56). While the Bible is not a simple rulebook containing a fixed percentage or simple standard for generosity, it does emphasize several guidelines over and over again. So if we want to give what God requires, we must faithfully observe these guidelines. (1) First, we must care about what God cares about—"the weightier matters of the law"—like justice, mercy, faithfulness and God's special concern for the poor (Matthew 23:23; cf. Micah 6:6-8; Deuteronomy 10:18-19). As Jesus told the meticulously tithing Pharisees, careful obedience is not enough—it is more important for us to seek justice, mercy and faithfulness, especially for the poor and oppressed (James 1:27; Hosea 6:6; Isaiah 58; Ezekiel 16:49). Refusing to care for the needs of the poor means that we are not merely lacking in generosity—it means that we have forsaken Jesus Himself (Matthew 25:31-46). (2) We must apply the greatest commandments to our money and possessions (see Luke 10:25-37). Everything in God's law hangs on these two commandments: to love God wholeheartedly and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:36-40). So, when confronted by financial decisions, we should ask ourselves, "Have I considered the financial needs of others to be as important as my own?" (see also Philippians 2:3-4). (3) We must imitate the sacrificial example of Jesus on the cross. His self-emptying death should become a way of life for us as generous Christians. This applies not only to our lives in general (Ephesians 5:1-2) but to our possessions in particular (2 Corinthians 8:9). "Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" (1 John 3:16-17). Our generosity ultimately will be judged by the degree to which it brings us into greater conformity with Jesus Christ and His death on the cross. In conclusion, the Bible envisions givers who give freely within form—like instrumentalists in a jazz band. When a jazz band jams, the lead musician often plays improvisationally. But this creative freedom always exists within a certain form—a framework composed of constants like the basic "beat" of the song, the musical key and the musical genre.1 Similarly, there is freedom within form when it comes to biblical generosity.

**How much does it take to count as generous?**
God measures our gifts with a measure different from that of the world. He is not impressed with large numbers. Rather, He measures according to (1) the giver's capacity (because He knows what we possess) and (2) the giver's attitude (because He knows the state of our hearts). Jesus spoke to this question directly when He compared the temple gifts of the rich men with the gift of the poor widow (Luke 21:1-4). By Jesus' reckoning, the widow gave more than the others because she gave all she had to live on. Her capacity was prohibitively little, but her attitude was extravagant. The rich, on the other hand, had so much wealth that even large gifts required little devotion of them. Biblical generosity is not any given dollar amount. Nor is it even just a given percentage rate (although percentage of assets is an important indicator of attitude, which is of great importance to God.) To be biblically generous is to recognize God's infinite beneficence toward us in Christ, and to give extravagantly in worship to Him, relative to what one has. To put it differently, biblical generosity is best gauged by asking not, "How much am I giving to God?" but, "How much am I keeping for myself?"

**Is it realistic for anyone to sell his possessions and give all his money to the poor?**
Yes. The idea tends to strike us as strange, but only because of our modern, secular assumptions about money. In the Bible, giving away large parts of one's income is quite realistic. John the Baptist taught that the man with two tunics should share with the man who has none (Luke 3:11). Zacchaeus the tax collector, when he converted to faith in Jesus, thought it fitting to give half of all he owned to the poor (Luke 19:1-10). Jesus praised a certain widow in the temple who gave away the last pennies she had to live on (Luke 21:1-4). The first Christians in the Jerusalem church willingly sold their own possessions to give to those in need (Acts 2:45). They were normal people, just like us. The only difference is that the life-changing power of the gospel had made its way even into their personal finances. And the same is possible for us, as well—though it is important to note we are not directly commanded to give all away, as the rich young ruler was. Above all, we should remember that Jesus promises that we cannot out-give Him. Whatever we do for His sake, He will take care of us and reward us. If we give away a fortune for Jesus' sake and earn a lower living standard, social status and health care, He may not give it back all in this life; but we do have the promise that our blessings soon will be eternal and that we can "store up treasure in heaven" rather than on earth precisely by doing such acts for the poor. And we may just find ourselves "reaping generously as we have sown generously ... having all that [we] need, [so that we] will abound in every good work ... rich in every way so that [we] can be generous on every occasion" (2 Corinthians 9:6, 8, 11).

**Isn't the Christian free to give whatever he chooses, even not at all?**
No. It is true that the apostle Paul says, "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion" (2 Corinthians 9:7). We might think, then, that the apostle is giving us liberty to be as selfish as we like. But curiously, this verse is situated in the middle of a passage urging Christians to give generously (vv 6-15). How can this be? Paul's point is not to give license for selfishness, but to cultivate a love of generosity within his listeners. He does not want to "hold their hands" through the giving process. Rather, he wants them to feel free, creative and excited to give far beyond any specific percentage. Because Jesus has accomplished our redemption and the age of the Spirit has come, Paul's logic goes, appealing to the tithe laws would be trivial. Yes, this is a sort of freedom unfamiliar to the Old Testament Jews. But it is a freedom to excel in good deeds, not a freedom to sin.

**Where (or to whom) should I give?**
While the Bible does not spell everything out in as much detail as we might like, it does give us relatively clear instructions on where (or to whom) we should give. (1) First, we should give to the poor and oppressed—especially within the Christian community (1 John 3:16-17). God has a special concern for the poor, specifically widows and orphans (Deuteronomy 10:18-19; James 1:27), the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, the naked, aliens and prisoners (Matthew 25:34-40), as well as victims of calamity (Luke 10:30-37; Acts 11:27-30). Because the Christian community is our spiritual family, we are especially responsible for the Christian needy (Romans 12:13), in the same way that we give special attention to our own spouses, children and parents before others (1 Timothy 5:8). Beyond this, we should give to the poor and needy in general, Christian or not (Deuteronomy 15:11). (2) We should give to religious workers. Specifically, we should give to pay pastors for their work (1 Corinthians 9:7-14; 1 Timothy 5:17-18) and to support missionaries (Philippians 4:15-19), among other things. (3) We should give to the needs of our immediate family members (cf. 1 Timothy 5:4, 8, 16) though not in extravagant ways that come at the expense of our larger Christian family (1 Timothy 6:6-8). (4) We should give what we owe to civil authorities, even if we believe we are being taxed unfairly. God has ordained civil authorities—imperfect as they may be—to oversee His work, and we are to financially empower them to do their jobs (Romans 13:6-7). (5) We should give to our enemies. This is perhaps a special mark of Christian generosity. Because God in Christ gave to us when we were His enemies, He calls us to be like Him by giving to those who hate us. This is the point of Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) and of the apostle Paul's instruction in Romans 12:20. (6) We should give to the Kingdom of God generally by taking every opportunity to show love to the community of faith and share the gospel with non-believers in word and deed. The above categories do not exhaust the things to which Christians may give. Rather, the Bible sets guidelines for giving that spark our creative freedom to give to God's work wherever we find it.

**What is sacrificial giving, and why is it important?**
Sacrificial giving is the kind that is done at great personal cost to the giver. It is possible to give without suffering any loss. Indeed, we do this all the time. When a family donates a bag of old clothes to the Salvation Army, or when a multibillionaire gives an impressive-sounding six-figure contribution, they feel no loss because it is in their best interest to discard those things anyway. Strictly speaking, in the words of author Randy Alcorn, this is not giving at all but "selective disposal". This kind of giving is fine (it is certainly better than throwing old clothes or money away), but there is nothing distinctively Christian about it. Even in the Old Testament, King David recognized this difference when he insisted, "I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing" (2 Samuel 24:24). The one great biblical example of generosity is Jesus' gift of Himself to make atonement for sins, which was done at unimaginable cost to the Giver (1 John 3:16). Obviously, our greatest sacrifices are not even in the same league with Jesus' unique sacrifice. But we Christians are imitators of our Lord, and for that reason we give our very best, that which it pains us to lose.

**How can wealthy people give sacrificially?**
With great difficulty. Sacrificial giving is the kind that is done at great personal cost to the giver. But a wealthy person, by definition, is someone who has so much money that he can weather losses with ease. The very function of wealth is to shield its owner so that it is hard for him to do anything at great personal cost. Indeed, for this very reason Jesus says, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:24). It is not that the poor are more righteous in God's sight than the rich; no, we are all equally hopeless (Romans 3:10). It is just that the rich are more likely to try to get along without God's help. The upshot is that a wealthy person, in order to reach the point of sacrifice, must give a much larger amount than a poor person would. Christian generosity is certainly more complex than any particular dollar amount or percentage rate. But practically speaking, if a wealthy Christian wants to begin giving sacrificially, he must sit down and calculate a number large enough that it will cut noticeably (even painfully) into his standard of living, and start giving at that level. For those who need help determining that number, missiologist Ralph Winter offers this suggestion: "Deliberately and decisively adopt a missionary support level as [your] standard of living and [your] basis of lifestyle regardless of income." If this "wartime lifestyle" seems hopelessly out of reach, consider what Jesus says to the rich: "What is impossible with men is possible with God" (Luke 18:27).

**How do I give cheerfully out of love, not just indifferently out of habit?**
With practice, over time. God reserves some of His harshest words for people whose religious acts have become merely ritual and devoid of sincere love (Isaiah 29:13). But human beings cannot easily change their inner motivations overnight. If a person's giving has become merely habitual, it will take time to unlearn this motivation and learn a new one in its place. Happily, though, if you are asking this question at all, then you are on the right track because you recognize your habitual giving for what it is. You should take two steps specifically. (1) Seek God with all your heart. We are powerless in ourselves to change our own motivations, but God is able and willing. Pray long and hard for His help, and do not give up. Ask Him to give you a greater understanding of the gospel, a greater love for Him, a greater love for other people, a place of service in the Kingdom, and more. (2) Don't stop giving. It may seem that you should stop giving altogether until you feel a change of inner motivation. But this would be a mistake. At many points in Christian life, we must do what is right even when the right feelings are not quite there yet. When rightly done, the very act of giving actually helps to develop our affections. Our hearts tend to follow our money (Matthew 6:21). Above all, don't give up. God will give you all the grace you need for this worthy goal.

**Does my level of giving determine my salvation?**
No. The Bible says clearly, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourself, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Salvation is utterly and completely a gift of God, accomplished by Jesus on our behalf. In no way does giving (or any other good work) secure God's favor. Indeed, it could not since our very best acts are themselves full of sin and fall horribly short of God's holiness. We only deceive ourselves if we give in hopes of winning God's affections. However, once we have been made new by the gospel, that same gospel changes us through and through, causing us to practice generosity (and other good works) out of thanksgiving to and love for God. What is more, even our own good works are a gift of God to us. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10). Thus, while a person's giving does not in any way determine his salvation, it is an excellent indicator that salvation has come to him.

**Must I always give in secret?**
No. Contrary to a common misinterpretation, when Jesus says, "[W]hen you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret" (Matthew 6:3-4), His point is not to command utter secrecy on all matters related to giving. Rather, He is concerned with our motivation for doing "acts of righteousness," whether we do them to be praised by men or to please God (Matthew 6:1). Consider that in this same passage, Jesus teaches His followers to do their praying and fasting in secret as well. But we pray (and sometimes fast) in public worship all the time because we recognize that even though it is subject to abuse, there is an appropriate way to pray in public. In the same way, there is an appropriate way to give in public. After all, the church shares a mutual responsibility for the spiritual growth of its members (Galatians 6:1-5), and this includes their use of money. As a matter of fact, joyful and humble public testimonies of generosity can be edifying and even contagious, stirring others to greater generosity (2 Corinthians 9:2). The point of Jesus' words in Matthew 6 is our motives—whom are we trying to please? There is no hard and fast rule for the proper degree of secrecy. The important thing is to be sure at every point that it is Christ who receives the glory for our acts of giving. It is God who saves and God who enables our works of righteousness. (With regard to "publicly" claiming gifts on income tax returns, Larry Burkett of Crown Financial Ministries offered this advice: "Whether you decide to claim your contribution on your income tax return is a matter of personal conviction. If you don't want to profit from your giving, you could give your tax refund as well.")

**Are there gifts that please God?**
Yes. In fact, the Bible is exceptionally clear on this matter. The Old Testament says that one of the primary reasons that God sent His Son Jesus was so that our offerings would be made acceptable to God (Malachi 3:4). Because we are all sinners who have turned our backs against God and desperately need His forgiveness, there's nothing we can give God that will please Him in any way. But Jesus' atoning sacrifice covers our sins and restores our fellowship with God as we accept His gift of salvation and respond in faith. As a result, God now is pleased with gifts that are offered to Him in faith by those who are redeemed. Gifts that please God include "doing good" and sharing with those in need (Acts 10:1-4; Hebrews 13:16) for Jesus' sake or in Jesus' Name. Our Father prefers gifts which focus on those things that are near to His heart, such as support of Christian missionaries and care for the poor and suffering (Matthew 25:31-46). God recognizes sacrificial giving that reflects a heart and mind committed to the Kingdom of Jesus and full of faith in the Father who provides all things for us. Finally, God loves gifts that come from proper motivation. Our motives may at times be mixed, but we must orient our minds and hearts so that we see the world and our wallets through heaven's eyes. As our motives improve, our giving should be cheerful giving that is inspired by the sacrificial gift of God's Son (2 Corinthians 8:9) and the generous care God provides for all (Matthew 5:42-46).

**Are there gifts that displease God?**
Yes. The Bible gives us several examples of gifts that displease God, from Cain's fruit to Ananias and Sapphira's money. God does not, among other things, approve of publicity stunts or gifts that are specifically designed to make us look good or glorify us as individuals, rather than bring glory to God. Gifts that function as personal advertising are contrary to the Holy Spirit, who directs the Christian in all things; the Spirit directs attention to the Father and the Son, not Himself or believers. Like the generosity of Paul's friend Barnabas, our giving may serve to encourage others publicly (Acts 4:34-37); but to give in order to draw attention to ourselves is an abomination (Acts 5:1-11). We should avoid gifts that function as bribes, attempting to get our way in church or other ministries simply because we give more than others. Not only does God disapprove of gifts that are given with wrong motives, but He is also displeased when those gifts are weakened by a lack of cheerfulness and joy (2 Corinthians 9:7b). Finally, we must not give thinking that our giving saves us by making us OK with God, for only the sacrificial death of Jesus accomplishes this. Givers who presume to earn salvation warrant God's judgment, not His commendation (Luke 18:9-14).

**Must I always give whatever is asked of me?**
No, but with a caution. This question is tricky because the Bible is so emphatic about our responsibility to give, but relatively silent about rules for refusing. It is clear from Scripture that God wants us to give generously, because He Himself gives generously and because we have received His generosity in the form of His Son (2 Corinthians 8:8-9). Jesus even goes so far as to say, "Give to everyone who asks you" (Luke 6:30), even if the person asking is an enemy. So there is a strong presumption in favor of giving when asked as an act of Christian charity. But there are some biblical reasons for saying no. (1) If the person is not poor or needy (e.g., a spoiled teenager), (2) if it is evident that the gift will cause the person harm (e.g., a drug addict in search of a hit), (3) if it is evident that the gift will promote sin (e.g., a solicitation from an abortion provider), or (4) if there is compelling reason to doubt the person's honesty (e.g., a known con man), then you may be justified in saying no. There is also a distinction between needy people (a clear biblical priority) and corporate solicitors (not a biblical priority, but very common in our day). We do not have the same obligation to organizations soliciting by mail or telemarketing that we do to our needy neighbors. In the case of the organizations, it is wise to develop a personal or family giving plan that includes both planned gifts and spontaneous gifts, both of which are biblically appropriate. In all this, we must take great care not to look for reasons to justify our own hard-heartedness, for God warns against this especially (Deuteronomy 15:9). Probably the best diagnostic question to ask is, "Why am I withholding what has been asked of me?" The crucial thing is to refuse only for biblical reasons, not for selfish ones. A related question might be whether to give to panhandlers.

**If I do not have the spiritual gift of giving, does God still expect me to give?**
Yes. It is plain from everyday experience that certain people are more disposed to certain activities than others, and the same is true of spiritual gifts in the church. In Romans 12, Paul explains that God has given special abilities (i.e., gifts) to each member of the body of Christ for each one to serve Him. These include leading, encouraging and giving, among other things. Paul says that some people have a particular knack for giving, but he does not say that the rest of us are exempt from it. In the words of British pastor Selwyn Hughes, "Scripture teaches that everyone is required to give, but some have a special gift that enables them to make wise investments or establish sound businesses so that they can make a special contribution to God's Church and Christian causes." Of course, there are lots of things that do not come naturally to us, but that we ought to do anyway. If you are someone (like most of us) for whom giving does not come naturally, that's OK, but be careful not to overlook from this important Christian service or deprive yourself of the rewards thereof. Pay special attention to your own areas of giftedness, but give generously of your money as befits anyone who has been changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**How can I tell if I have the spiritual gift of giving?**
There are basically two ways to identify your spiritual gifts: (1) take a written test, and/or (2) have someone (ideally a pastor) observe your behavior. In the American church today, the first approach is probably more common. But it is best to make use of both approaches, if possible. Most written spiritual gift inventories include the gift of giving (Romans 12:6-8) among their possibilities. A written inventory will at least point you in the right direction, but the real test of a spiritual gift is its evidence in a person's life. What does your actual behavior tell you? Do you tend to give especially large gifts, relative to your income? Do you give over and above your tithe to other ministries of the church? Do you give regularly to other ministries in addition to the church? If you can answer yes to these questions, then you are exhibiting evidence of the spiritual gift of giving. Once you know what your gifts are, you can begin using them to worship the Lord Jesus and serve the church He redeemed.

**Why doesn't God always give me what I ask?**
Because of His great wisdom, which we sometimes cannot understand. God loves to give generously to His people (James 1:5), and the Bible assures us that as a rule God grants what we ask (1 John 5:14-15). Like any good father, God knows how to give good gifts to His children and is eager to do so (Matthew 7:11). He proved His fatherly goodwill toward us once and for all with the gift of His own Son (Romans 5:8). But also like any good father would do, God withholds things that His children should not have even though they may ask for them. This is almost certainly why God does not honor prayers like, "Lord, let me win the lottery." Because gambling leads to sin and because sudden wealth tends to lead to ruin, God gives us what is best for us by denying our foolish prayers. Sometimes we do not have because we do not ask (James 4:2). Other times we do not have because we ask selfishly (James 4:3). Still other times we do not have because God has a hidden purpose for us which involves our not having—but in these cases God provides whatever grace is necessary for us to get by without (2 Corinthians 12:9).

**Does prosperity lead to generosity?**
Ideally, yes. But in fact, often not. Prosperity should lead to generosity, for the Scripture says that God makes people wealthy so that they can be generous—that is one of the purposes of the wealth (2 Corinthians 9:11). But ironically, the Scripture also says that wealth often has an adverse effect on the wealthy, making them less generous rather than more. Thus, although wealthy people should be rich toward God, they are often rich toward themselves instead (Luke 12:21) so that many will not enter the Kingdom of God (Luke 18:18-25, 16:19-31). But this result is not unavoidable. When wealthy people are radically changed by the gospel, they become generous in the way God intends. In other words, prosperity can lead to generosity, when God's grace is present.

**Does generosity result in poverty?**
As a rule, no. This is counterintuitive, of course. It seems to us that if you give all your money away, you will be left with nothing. But God's economy of redemption includes a special provision for generosity. The apostle Paul writes, "Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your supply of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion" (2 Corinthians 9:10-11). In other words, as we give, God will provide us with more so that we can keep on giving. There are exceptions to this rule, but in general, God assures us that people who give generously to Him need not fear destitution.

**Aren't taxes enough? Do I also have to give to church or charity?**
Doesn't it sometimes feel as if both God and the government are after your money? We all feel that way from time to time, but it comes from a misunderstanding on our part. We feel that way because we imagine that our money is really ours. In fact, everything belongs to God (Psalm 24:1). We cannot grudge Him because it all belongs to Him anyway. The reason that we should both pay taxes and give to the Lord is that they are two very different things. Taxes are paid to the state for the maintenance of society (albeit with God's approval; see Romans 13). But offerings are given freely to God out of gratitude for the gospel and for the purpose of ministry. Taxes and offerings have different purposes, different motivations and different recipients. That's why taxes paid don't count as gifts given to God. We pay our taxes because we have to, but we give generously to the Lord because we want to.

**What are some wrong motives for giving?**
The Bible speaks of several wrong motives for giving. One is the desire to be seen by other people. Those who want public acclaim for their generosity, Jesus says, forfeit any reward they might have received from God (Matthew 6:1-4). A second wrong motive for giving is the desire to conceal one's greed. This seems to be the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, who gave a part of a sum while saying that it was the whole (Acts 5:1-11). A third wrong motive for giving is unwilling compulsion. Paul writes, "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). Christian generosity is to be willing, not forced or manipulated. Finally, we should not give to try to earn the love of God. These are wrong motives for giving, because they all, in different ways, contradict the spirit of the gospel.

**If my motives are wrong, should I stop giving?**
No. God does not want us to give with improper motives (2 Corinthians 9:7), but this is not to say that a person should wait to give until he is sure his motives are proper. If we were to do that, we might never give at all. As with so many areas of the Christian life, sometimes we have to just start obeying and pray for a change of heart as we go. The change of motives might only come during or after the act of obedience. (Indeed, the very fact that you recognize your wrong motives is a sign that they are changing.) Happily, the same God who demands proper motives is the One Who brings about those proper motives in us. He gave us the gift of His Son; surely we can count on Him for this as well. You should aspire to right motives in giving. But the best way to cultivate right motives in giving is to ask for the Lord's help and start giving.

**Is it OK for me to expect special treatment from a ministry in proportion to the size of my donations?**
No. Christian donors should not expect special treatment commensurate to the size of their donations. Jesus said, "Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:1). If a ministry chooses to show a donor special attention, that is its prerogative. But for the donor's part, he must not go seeking after it. (Ministry updates and thanks, such as are appropriate for any donor, may be reasonably expected. It is the desire for special treatment that is the problem.) Jesus' words are striking in their clarity: If we choose to give in order to win attention from a ministry, we forfeit any reward we might have received from God.

**Is it OK for Christians to accept gifts from non-Christians?**
In general, yes. There is not a lot of biblical data on this question, perhaps because in Scripture, Christians more often are seen in the role of givers than receivers vis-à-vis non-Christians (see, e.g., Jesus' instructions in Luke 6:27-36). But we do have some biblical examples of believers receiving gifts from unbelievers. So, for example, Solomon accepted gifts from the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:2), and Nehemiah took donations from the Persian king to build the wall of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:8). In both cases, God seems to have approved of the transaction. Similarly, there is no problem with Christians today accepting gifts from non-Christians as part of the normal give-and-take of friendship. Indeed, the Lord may even use the process to lead unbelievers to Himself. There may be some cases, however, when a believer should politely decline a gift from an unbeliever because the gift could lead to sinful compromise. Zerubbabel refused the help of the Samarians in rebuilding the temple (Ezra 4:1-3) apparently because of the prospect of corrupting influence. But aside from such cases, Christians should feel free to give and receive gifts with non-Christians as part of their witness in the world.