

Selfless generosity

We know a man who is a philanthropist. He helps a lot of people, feeds hungry people by donating to feeding schemes, has built orphanages and schools for the poor, and does a mountain of other charitable work. He is exceptionally hospitable and has a constant flow of people coming through his house and having meals with him and his family. From a worldly perspective he is the ideal philanthropist. However, as we got to know him and had meals with him we discovered that he loved to talk about all his charitable deeds. We started to realise that this wasn't selfless generosity at all. It was a subtle selfishness. He, not God, was at the center of all his generosity.

Matthew 6:1-4 "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

² "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

1) The problem with subtle selfishness

- Selfishness can be very subtle
- As with the man in the introductory story he thought that His works would earn him favour with God.
 - He was like the Pharisees who loved to practice their righteousness in front of others to be seen by them.
 - Such people get commended for their good works all the time.
- The problem with subtle selfishness is that the person doesn't realise that what they're doing is selfishness at all.
 - They are convinced that what they're doing is purely for the benefit of the people they're helping.
 - Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?
- Why would anyone help others if it's an act of selfishness?
 - It makes them feel good about themselves.
 - It eases their conscience
 - It boosts their ego when they get constant commendations for their good work
- Some traits of selfish generosity
 - They tend to be harsh and unkind in their manner towards people they're helping
 - At times they can manipulate the people they're helping – we've been helping you all the time now this is what I expect you to do for me.
 - They expect things to always go their way when there's a difference of opinion between them and the people they're helping.
- A true story of a church that went bankrupt: It started with a group of men approaching the treasurer of a church that had a big bank balance – about R600,000. They asked if the church would loan them R10,000 and they would return R20,000, which they did. Each time the amount increased and the men would always pay back double the amount. This continued until the church gave the full balance and the men disappeared. The men were selfish givers with the intention of scamming the church.
- Satan is at the root of subtle selfishness as he masquerades as an angel of light seemingly doing good, but always with ulterior motives.
- How pure are your motives when you help others?

2) Selfless generosity

- Matthew 6:3-4 But when 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.
- I so often hear people say that other religions give so much to people in need, especially in times of crisis, and Christians don't give anything.
 - The problem with that statement is that Christians often give without publicizing what they're doing and so aren't noticed.
 - I've been to a lot of charitable events, or seen them on TV or social media, of other religions. Many times they specifically invite the media to cover their events.
 - Christians who do their good works without anyone noticing are merely following Jesus' instructions to help the needy in secret.
- It takes a selfless person to do this because the only person who knows that they're giving generously is the person being helped and God, and no one else.
- To the casual observer the selfless giver could be misunderstood as heartless and selfish because they are never seen to be giving to others in need.
 - The true selfless giver will resist the temptation to justify themselves knowing that God sees all that they do in secret even when no one else sees, and if he justifies us who else matters!
- The greatest and most selfless giver is God himself
 - He gave the best that he had – His only begotten Son – to a world that would reject Him, and even those who wouldn't reject Him would never be able to repay Him.
- A human example of a selfless giver is Mother Theresa who sacrificed herself for the benefit of the poor. She gave all she had that they might die with dignity.

3) Which reward do you want?

- Aha! We might say when we hear of someone like Mother Theresa. Everyone knows her. She's an internationally known celebrity because of her good works. Her works weren't done in secret as Jesus commanded.
 - That's true that Mother Theresa is known internationally by Christians and non-Christians alike for her good works, but did she try to display her good works herself, or did other start noticing what she was doing and displayed them without her consent?
 - Good works that start in secret and grow often can't be hidden. However, the difference is who gets the glory – God or the person.
 - Matthew 5:14-16 "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.
- It's our choice which reward we want
 - The temporal and often fickle reward from people.
 - Or the eternal genuine reward from God.
 - The reward that He has for us is our inheritance he has kept secure in heaven for us
 - Colossians 3:23-24 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.
- It ultimately comes down to us pleasing God or pleasing man
 - John 12:42-43 Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human praise more than praise from God.