

Benefits for the Giver

Rev. Dewey Johnson, Pastor Emeritus

For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent help for my needs more than once. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account.

- Philippians 4:16, 17

Dolly Parton was once asked if she believed in giving money to homeless people. "I believe in my cosmetic line," she answered. "There are plenty of charities for the homeless. Isn't it time somebody helped the homely?"

With the passage of years, I bet she regrets having said that. She is right, though, about there being numerous charities, not only for the homeless, but for almost every needy situation there is. Just make donations to a couple of charities and see how many appeals from other charities fill your mailbox. It has been my experience (duh!) that charities buy and sell mailing lists.

I don't hold this against them, though. Charities are run by people for whom their cause is near and dear to their hearts. But not all of them are near and dear to my heart. And even if they were, I wouldn't have sufficient skills or enough time or enough money to help them all.

Years ago, there was an interesting episode in this regard on the *Andy Griffith Show*. Andy, the Sheriff of Mayberry, has been elected chairman of the Needy Children's Charity Drive. The adults are donating to this charity at various local businesses. The not-so-needy children are taking up a collection at the school.

Word gets back to Andy that his son, Opie, has given only a penny at school, even though he has "a ton of money in his piggy bank." Andy gets upset and on a couple of occasions explains to Opie why he should give more to the Needy Children's Drive. Each time Opie answers that he can't give any more because he's saving his money. Andy gets so perturbed that Aunt Bee intervenes and tells him to ease up.

That night Andy calls Opie to the supper table and tells him that if he wants to pass up this charity this one time, he can do so. It is only then that Opie tells his father why he is saving his money. There is a girl in his class who doesn't have a coat, and he wants to buy her one before winter.

Andy says, "Opie, you never told me that was why you were saving your money." Opie answers, "Pa, you never asked me."

In the scripture above, Paul says he appreciates the help his fellow Christians have given him in his struggles, but more so, he's proud of the growth in faith that making these donations represent. In other words, "It is better to give than receive." (Acts 20:35)

Sometimes we're in a situation in which we need to give, period. Our help is called for, regardless of our feelings. But I don't see that, in terms of faith, it's better to give than receive if we resent having made the gift. I don't see that it's better if we have to pass up another valid need that is nearer and dearer to the heart.

Matthew 6:21 says, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." This saying most often points out a flaw in our faith. Namely, we're not faithful because we're selfish. We treasure taking care of Number One. But, on the other hand, when it comes to choosing between giving our time, talent, or treasure to Charity A versus Charity B, Matthew 6:21 points out the obvious. We're going to help out the one that pulls on our heartstrings. Where our heart is, there will our treasure be also. And we may give far more, as with Opie, than if that was not the case.