

CHRISTIAN MONEY \$ENSE

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No Surprise

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Have you ever exchanged gifts with someone only to realize the gift you gave was not as expensive as the gift you received? Several years ago, a friend of mine had planned to give his girlfriend a nice Christmas card saying that he appreciated and loved her with all his heart - how touching! However, he planned this only to find out that his girlfriend had planned to surprise him with a sports jersey from his favorite team and tickets to see this team play. How surprising that would have been! Thankfully for my friend, this surprise came to his attention, and he bought several more items for his girlfriend.

Imagine this: you have been saving a small portion of your income (2 to 3%) for many years in order to give a gift to your best friend. You end up giving him a gift worth several thousand dollars. This person accepts the gift with much appreciation. Now you receive your gift, only to find out that you have been given a mansion with much land. Surprise! However, the twist to this story is that it is not a surprise at all. In fact, He has told you since the beginning that He has been diligently preparing a mansion for you.

Now based on this knowledge, would you change what you give and how you give it? From this, you might say "a lot more" and "cheerfully." Often, we as Christians give sparingly and squeamishly. We give sparingly because we are afraid that we may run out of money and will not be able to provide for our needs. It tends to lead us to worry when we feel like we have to "tighten our belts." These feelings of scarcity help us rationalize giving less to the Lord's work.

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, relates his thoughts on this by concluding, "Therefore, take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matt. 6:31-33, KJV) So in other words, think of God's kingdom first (this includes your giving), and don't worry about your

earthly provisions. We are robbing ourselves of the blessing of seeing God provide in wonderful ways or of just rejoicing in obeying His commands.

When we take the world's view on providing for ourselves and forget that God is our provider, we second-guess our giving, or it makes us cringe when putting our gifts to God in the offering plate or mail. However, Paul states God's thought about our attitude in giving by saying, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." (II Cor. 9:7, KJV) The Greek word for "cheerful" in this passage is actually the word we have derived - "hilarious." God doesn't want us to just have a smirk or small grin on our faces when we give; He wants us to be excited almost to the point of laughter. This happiness comes from knowing that God will bless us so much more greatly than what we can give. Or as I have heard before, "You can't out-give God."

So what can you do about this? You need to check your motives before you give. Ask yourself, "Am I giving right now out of cheerfulness or obligation?" If it is out of cheerfulness, excellent! You are following God's command. But if you are doing it out of obligation, begin to think of all that God has done for you, is currently doing for you, and will give to you some day. Think about the fact that all things are His. Find in Scripture what God says about those who give without sparing. Get excited about the fact that you are contributing to the cause of the Almighty God who reigns in heaven above!

Most of us would probably agree that we shouldn't give sparingly or reluctantly, but what is your attitude? You can change these attitudes by remembering what God will be presenting you in the future some day: a mansion that is eternal. It is not a surprise, so prepare diligently.

BBC Foundation has been ministering to churches and individuals regarding biblical stewardship since 1992. Send your questions on finances and stewardship to: BBC Foundation, 538 Venard Rd., Clarks Summit, PA 18411. Phone: (800) 451-8668, website: bbcfoundation.org; e-mail: info@bbcfoundation.org