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PRESSIN' IN

The Teaching Letter of Toward the Mark

If you were to walk straight out the back door of my house, over the railroad tracks and about an eighth of a mile through the woods you would find yourself on the campus of Warwick High School, the alma mater of the Atlanta Falcons star quarterback Michael Vick. Early on it had become obvious to everyone in town that this gifted young athlete was developing an almost Michael Jordan kind of athletic quality and we all knew that great things were in store for him. As a senior at Warwick, Michael was scouted by the top universities around the country but chose to stay close to home and signed with Virginia Tech.

Each year that he played proved to establish him even more in the eyes of Pro scouts as an extremely valuable commodity. When he became eligible for the NFL draft, team owners and coaches all over the league began frantically moving players and draft picks around like pieces on a board game in hopes of positioning themselves for a shot at acquiring Michael's talents.

He was initially drafted by the San Diego Chargers but waived the offer and signed with the Falcons. It was a big day for Atlanta, to say the least, when the Falcons signed Michael. John Madden, the popular sports commentator has said on numerous occasions that Michael Vick has brought a whole new level of excitement to the game of football and is the most gifted player that he has ever watched play. What a rare and valuable find!

Just as NFL scouts are continuously looking for extra special players like Michael, God is also always searching far and wide to find extra special standouts where obedience to His Word is concerned. "For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and he pondereth all his goings." (Proverbs 5:21) When He finds such a person it thrills His heart beyond measure! Why? Because God loves to give, and in order for a giver to be



Give to Give!

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able to give they must first have a qualified receiver. Without a qualified receiver a giver is miserable!

This is why it is of the utmost importance that we are not only hearers of God's Word but are continuously doing His word. "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." (James 1:21-22) Remember, only those who truly love, believe and obey God's Word qualify to receive His rewards!

Down through the years, I have noticed that perhaps the one area where God is not believed with the most frequency is in the area of giving. I am not saying that people are not giving at all or all those who do give have underlying selfish ulterior motives, I am saying however that I believe that the vast majority who are giving in the church today are doing so with strings attached. Whether they give

for the purpose of silencing something deep within themselves, obtaining money, houses, cars, relationships, jobs, favor, position etc., the general consensus has rapidly become, if there is nothing in it for me why "throw away" my hard earned money, especially if it means running the risk of my never receiving a return on it.

Believe me, anyone who thinks this way obviously does not know God! Although this "market place" frame of thought may serve well on Wall Street, it has no place in the body of Christ! "For we (true believers) walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7) Just what is at the root of this self centered way of thinking? In large part this mindset has been forged at the hands of those teaching an unbalanced version of what the scriptures teach us about God's process of seed, time and harvest. This distorted misrepresentation of God's original intent for the process of sowing and reaping is not

only creating in the hearts and minds of those who practice it a “buy a miracle” mentality but destroys in them everything that Jesus teaches us about storing up for ourselves treasures in heaven. “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Matthew 6:19-21)

If you have lived here for any length of time at all you know that the United States is a nation where materialism reigns supreme. If we Christians are not well educated where God’s heart for giving is concerned we too can find ourselves deceived into offering up our money, goods and services not for the purpose of the glorification or the pure worship of God, but in exchange for what amounts to no more than playing the lottery, i.e. giving in hopes that one day we will hit the big one. “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.” (Hosea 4:6)

I am not saying that God does not bless us with a harvest for seed sown in fertile soil, after all, everything God does is based on seed, time and harvest. I am saying that it is time that we thoroughly examine our heart’s motives for why we are sowing to begin with. “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.” (James 4:3) Never give to get, give to give!

Perhaps one of the most manipulatively wielded scriptures in the quest for “getting” has been the following one in Luke chapter 6. Jesus said, “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.” (Luke 6:38) I believe that this scripture, among other things, has been abused terribly for the purpose of leveraging fundraising campaigns in the Church.

Contrary to popular belief, Jesus is not even talking about the acquisition of money or material possessions here. If we look at just seven verses before the Luke 6:38 scripture we will find exactly what He was talking about. “And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them

which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.” (Luke 6:31-37)

Now let’s read Luke 6:38 again. Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again. If you truly want to know what God means in scripture, it

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is necessary to read verses in context! What is Jesus referring to when He says “give” in this text? Is He talking about money or things? No! Although one might at first glance see why so many have used this scripture to teach God’s principle of sowing and reaping for the purpose of material or monetary gain, if we look at it in context with the previous verses it becomes obvious that Jesus was actually talking about the way we should treat one another. He states in Luke 6:35 “But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest”

Before we can ever expect to receive anything from God, we must first learn how to give into the lives of others love and goodness, “hoping for nothing again” as Jesus instructs us. This is the key! Do you realize that Jesus, just by making this one statement, is knowingly safeguarding us from the tormenting wrath of unreal or unreasonable expectations. I am convinced these expectations are the primary cause of depression in the lives of millions of people today. When we give to get we are setting ourselves up for all manner of disappointing frustration. “And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.” (Luke 6:34)

In order for us to first be able to walk in the promise that Jesus is making here we must first come to the place where we know without a shadow of a doubt that God alone is our provider and not our employers, parents, mates or anyone else! If we don’t know this wholeheartedly what we tend to do is show an impure

form of love and goodness to others in hopes of their giving to us in return. Not only is this the practice of manipulation, a form of witchcraft, but it disqualifies those who do practice it from receiving all that God has for them. In short, what we are doing is giving up everything that God has to offer to possess very little at best. Remember, God can do in one second what it can take a million people a lifetime to accomplish. If we give love and goodness to others with a pure heart, “hoping for nothing again” then what we are doing is in fact freeing up God to move on the hearts of whomever He chooses to meet whatever need we may have when we need it. Be advised, prosperity is not having everything, prosperity is have exactly what you need when you need it! “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.” (3 John 1:2) How does our soul prosper? “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.” (Psalms 1:1-3) This is true prosperity!

Because of a total misunderstanding of what prosperity truly is many in the church have found themselves pursuing or being encouraged by those who “suppose that gain is godliness” to pursue material or monetary gain thinking and even teaching that they are synonymous with God’s definition of prosperity. This could not be further from the truth. “And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort. If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. But godliness with contentment is great gain.” (1 Timothy 6:2-6)

This frame of thought is in fact a direct result of an unbalanced version of what is currently known as the prosperity message. Prosperity was never intended by God to be something that we should pursue. Our

passion is to be for the pursuit of God and Him alone! Once we get this firmly fixed in our hearts and minds then true prosperity can begin to flow from the hand of God into our lives and not a second before. Godly prosperity is a result of diligently seeking God first! “And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? 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.” (Matthew 6:28-33) Joshua when exhorting the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh said, “But

take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the LORD charged you, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul.” (Joshua 22:5) This and only this is the birthplace of true prosperity!

Now, let’s take a look again at Luke 6:38 in the light of what I have shared thus far. “Give, and it shall be

given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom.” If you noticed, Jesus did not say that men shall give into your treasury, stables or storehouse. He said that they shall give into your bosom. What is meant by the word bosom here? The Webster’s Dictionary defines bosom as, 1) the human breast. 2) the breast regarded as the source of feelings. 3) the interior midst. Noah Webster’s 1828 edition defines bosom, in composition, implies intimacy, affection and confidence; as a bosom friend, an intimate or confidential friend; bosom - lover, bosom - interest, bosom - secret. In such phrases, bosom may be considered as an attribute equivalent to intimate, confidential, dear. In Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance, the Hebrew word for Bosom is cheyq (pronounced khake) and means to “inclose; the bosom, bottom, lap, midst, within.” “The basic idea is that of a hollow or cavity from which the ideas of a hollow formed by a fold of a garment at the breast and the hollow of the lap are derived.” A variety of abstract, figurative ideas are expressed by this term. Family intimacy may be emphasized (Deut 28:54; Mic 7:5). Tender care or concern may be expressed as in the poor man’s care

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for his only sheep (2 Sam 12:3), the widow's care for her sick son (1 Kings 17:19), and God's carrying his people in his arms in his bosom (Isa 40:11). Giving the old king's wives into the new king's bosom showed the new king's authority (2 Sam 12:8; cf. also Gen 1:1 - 1 Kings 5:15). Naomi formally laid Ruth's child "in her bosom" as a symbol that this child was her (and her husband's) legitimate heir (Ruth 4:16). The "bosom," like other physical terms (e.g. "bones," "kidneys," and "heart") may serve as an emphatic, intimate term for the person himself. Judgment "into the bosom" marks the object of judgment with special intimacy (Isa 65:6; cf. Jer 32:18, NASB) Anger lodging in the bosom of fools (Eccl 7:9), fire in the "bosom" (Prov 6:27), and prayer returning to the bosom of the one who prays (Ps 35:13; KJV, ASV) are other typical examples of this motif (cf. also Ps 89:50 [H 51]; Job 19:27, lit. "my kidneys in my bosom are finished"). To have one in our bosom implies kindness, secrecy, intimacy (Gen 16:5; 2 Sam 12:8). Christ is in the bosom of the Father; that is, possesses the closest intimacy with, and most perfect knowledge of the Father (John 1:18). Our Saviour is said to carry his lambs in his bosom, which touchingly represents his tender care and watchfulness over them (Isa 40:11).

Now, let's read it again. "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom." If with a pure motive you give to give, "hoping for nothing again," God can then move on the hearts of others to give to you, compounded, the love and kindness that you have given to others.

Please note that I am in no way stating that we will necessarily receive back from the same person or people that we have given kindness to or that we will receive what we want when we think we need it. I am saying that God will see to it that we will, in His time, in His way and through those he chooses to work, receive a harvest of love and kindness unto our own bosom or heart in the way He chooses to bring it to us. Don't be deceived, Father always knows what's best for us! Despite how discouraged we may become with the moral state of those around us in the world, we must not let anything hinder us from continually giving to give! "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." (Galatians 6:7-10)

Paul teaches in this verse something that I know that none of us really likes to hear, that tormenting little phrase "in due season." Why don't most of us like hearing this? Because it implies waiting to receive our promise for an undisclosed period of time. In this day and time waiting, although necessary where the things of God are concerned, is not popular or very well received. He says, And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. What would cause us to faint? A lack of believing that God will do exactly as He has promised in His word! Here is how it works. Unbelief produces fleshly fear. Fear leads to doubt. Doubt leads to striving. Striving

produces fatigue and fatigue gives way to faintheartedness. So, if failing to believe God ultimately causes us to become faint of heart then it would stand to reason that faith or believing God will prevent us from becoming fainthearted. "Abide in

me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." (John 15:4-5) This includes giving the "right" way!

Without an understanding of God's heart for giving, all we can do is abuse it! So, give love, encouragement and kindness from a pure heart "and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom." "For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again." "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." (Matthew 7:12) Jesus says, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John 13:34-35) Always give to give!

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