

BACKWARDS



Illustration by M. C. Escher

IT IS CONSIDERABLY MORE AGREEABLE to think of ourselves as givers, rather than takers. Our perspective is typically one of magnanimity; we consider ourselves to be relatively independent beings who, from time to time, out of the goodness of our hearts, give to others.

We give to our pleasant neighbors. We give to our children. We give to our aged parents. We give to missionaries who serve in our stead. We give to the Red Cross and the local homeless shelter.

We give to God.

Sunday mornings we write a check and place it in the offering, giving Him some of our hard-earned cash. Sunday afternoon or Tuesday evening we attend a committee meeting, giving Him some of our time. Twice a year, on Saturday morning, we join in the church workday, giving Him some of our labor. And every other day we spend two minutes in prayer, giving Him some of our attention.

And we feel pretty good about our giving. We are, at heart, good people who *want* to give to God. We choose to. It is right. It is righteous. It is, at times, holy. After all, Jesus Himself commanded us to give.

"Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you."

Matthew 5:42

Our times of generosity, especially toward our God, leave us with a warm, glowing sensation inside. We have honored Him. We have served Him. We have given Him His portion.

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father's house in safety, then the Lord will be my God. This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."

Genesis 28:20-22

In Christ, however, there *is* no "portion."

For those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb,

there is no "giving" to God. *Here, Lord. I'm a good and generous person, and I think You can use this. So here You go. No charge. (Boy, that felt great.)* Does the employee give, out of the goodness of his heart, his time and labor to the employer?

Does the slave, because he is generous, give his time and labor to the master?

Our Sunday morning offering does not represent our gracious giving to God. Rather, what we do *not* give in that offering represents what God graciously permits us to keep for ourselves. We are not being magnanimous in our time and labor spent for Him. *He* is magnanimous in giving us the rest of our time and labor to spend on ourselves. And those few moments in prayer do not represent our unselfish giving of attention. Rather, the vast reservoir of moments in which we elected *not* to spend time with our Father represent time we have stolen from that which is due Him.

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

In Christ, we do not give some. Rather, we are allowed to keep the rest. We are not gracious in our giving. Rather, it is God who is gracious in *His* giving.

Everything we "give" to God already belongs to Him. The exchange is not a measure of our generosity, but of His superabounding grace in permitting us everything else we spend upon ourselves and others.

God is not so much interested in the size of the check we place in the offering plate, or the number of minutes we spend before His throne. His concern is for the condition of our heart, and our willingness to ascribe to Him everything we are and have and do.

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."

Galatians 2:20

