

POTOMAC PRESBYTERY TRACTS.

No. 1.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF GIVING.

BY THE

REV. P. D. GURLEY, D. D.

WASHINGTON:

M'GILL & WITHEROW, PRINTERS.

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Presbyterian Historical Society
425 Lombard Street
Philadelphia, Pa. 19147

INTRODUCTION.

At its erection with its present dimensions, by the Synod of Baltimore, in the fall of 1859, the Presbytery of Potomac found itself of necessity a missionary Presbytery to a much greater degree than usual. It consisted of only about five or six self-sustaining churches, surrounded by about double that number receiving aid from the Board of Missions. Its boundaries include, we believe, ten counties in the State of Virginia, the District of Columbia, and six large counties in the State of Maryland. The necessary consequence of that state of facts has been that the Missionary Committee of the Presbytery has had to make very large drafts on the Board of Missions in proportion to the amount which our churches have contributed to the funds of that Board. But if we can get our members, not only in some of the churches, but in all of them, heartily enlisted in some plan of raising missionary money, we surely can come very near paying our own expenses, if we do not quite reach that most desirable point at first. We by no means intend, in the slightest degree, to discourage the liberal gifts of those who are able to give much. We trust that their gifts may at least not be diminished. But the Presbytery feel it to be the solemn duty to God, and to his or her generation, of every child of God, at such a time as this, to give something every year—every Christian every year—to preach the Gospel of Christ in destitute places. This is not the place to argue that question. Dr. GUNTER has done that work ably, thoroughly, and readably, in the following tract. The Presbytery wish to distribute the "Blessedness of Giving" among their members. They wish every man and woman to have an interest in

the home missions. They solemnly believe, dear Christian reader, that you will be apt to pray more for the outpouring of the Divine Spirit upon the missions, to feel more interest in these missions, to have a heart more alive to the coming of Christ's kingdom, and indeed to enjoy more of the Spirit of Christ, other things being equal, if you yourself give some money, regularly, every year, perhaps every quarter of a year, to the missionary cause, than if you do not do so. Under these impressions, this resolution was unanimously adopted:

Resolved, That Presbytery deem it the solemn duty of each communicant on the rolls of its churches to contribute at least one dollar a year to Domestic Missions; and that the Sessions of the churches be strictly directed to see that each member be earnestly sollicitous to do so—the amount to be paid to the Stated Clerk at each fall meeting of Presbytery."

Now, if this *dollar scheme*, as it has been called, can be carried into thorough effect, and those who now give more than that sum abide by the present amount of their donations, without any falling off, then, as sure as cause and effect are connected, this Presbytery will pay its own expenses as they are at present. She will find available fields within her bounds for much larger expenditures of money in preaching Christ's Gospel in its Presbyterian depth and faithfulness, and she will have something over to put into the coffers of the Board of the Church, to preach the same precious Gospel in the "region beyond." Ponder deeply this whole subject, O Christian! Read the following discourse attentively; and then take your Bible, and go and lay it somewhere in a sunbeam, open at the words: "IF ANY MAN HAVE NOT THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST, HE IS NONE OF HIS;" and then may the Lord bless you in your deed, and give you rich answers to your prayers.

J. H. B.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF GIVING.

ACTS XX, 35: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

These are the words of the Lord Jesus. They breathe the very spirit of His own life and doctrine. They are not recorded in either of the four Gospels; but Paul quotes them in his touching address to the Elders at Ephesus, as words with which they were familiar, and which it was well understood were the very words of the Master. As He pursued His mission of love, and "went about doing good," it may have been His habit to say very often to those around him, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." At any rate, if this was not one of His *oft-repeated* sayings, it was certainly one of His most *precious* sayings; and it seems even to have a peculiar value from the fact that it is not recorded in the regular and professed histories of His life. Some one has said, "It comes to us recovered, as it were, from the great mass of His unrecorded sayings; rescued from that oblivion to which it was hastening if left to mere tradition, and placed in permanent form in the Sacred Writings by the act of an Apostle who had never seen the Saviour before His crucifixion." It is a precious relic, a truly and deeply touching memento of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us; and the effect of it is, to make us almost regret that more

of his "gracious words" were not recovered in like manner from an uncertain tradition, and put upon record by the pen of inspiration. Why the number is so limited, is known only to God. To that inquiry we can but say, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." But let us be thankful that this saying was recorded before the Sacred Canon closed; and let us be assured that it was written for our good, and deserves our most earnest and prayerful consideration.

"It is more blessed to give than to receive." Surely this is a great and a noble utterance. It is worthy of the Son of God, and, coming from Him, it is surpassingly impressive, inasmuch as it exhibits the great principle upon which He acts as our Redeemer. Touched by the sight of our ruin, He leaves the throne of His glory and the bosom of His Father that He may provide for our salvation. For our sakes He takes upon Him the form of a servant, and is made in the likeness of men. For our sakes He becomes "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." In lowliness, and poverty, and suffering, He devotes Himself to our immortal interests. He assumes our legal liabilities, and becomes our substitute and surety. He is wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. At the expense of His own precious blood and life, He atones for our offenses, secures for us the favor of God, and opens to us the gates of Paradise; and when, with blended gratitude and amazement, we inquire for the principle which governs Him in all this benevolent and self-sacrificing mission, the response He gives us is, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Verily that response is the key to His own wonderful career and achievements as the Word made flesh and dwelling among us, "full of grace and truth;" and while it is an explanation

of His own conduct as our Redeemer, it is also a lesson to us. It says: "If you would be my followers, you must live and act under the sway of benevolence; you must esteem it a greater privilege to give than to receive; you must seek your own highest happiness in promoting the happiness of others." Such a lesson from such a Source, such a lesson enforced by such an example, may well arrest our attention. When He who receives the homage of cherubim and seraphim in the highest heavens comes down to this dark and distant world, and gives Himself to shame and death, a ransom for sinners; and when, in the very act of doing this, He addresses us in the words of the text, and says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive;" then certainly it becomes us to pause and ponder the declaration, that we may learn from it that our highest interest and our happiness are to be found, not in hoarding the gifts of providence and grace, as though they were designed exclusively for our own benefit, but in using and dispensing them for the benefit of others.

Let us consider, for a moment, some of the reasons why "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

1. *Giving assimilates us to God.* As He is our creator, so He is our constant and most bountiful benefactor. Of all benefactors He is the greatest and the best. It is His delight to make His creatures happy; and if they fail of happiness, it is because they reject His counsel and depart from His ways. All His works of creation and providence are but the outflowings of His goodness. Life and health, food and raiment, relatives and friends, family and home, everything, everything that is pleasant in our earthly lot or promising in our earthly prospects, we receive from Him. Where is there a blessing of which He is not the source? Where is there a spot or a turn in all

our past history which is not radiant with the displays of His mercy? When comes the hour or the moment to any of us in which we are not the objects of His care and the recipients of His bounty? Surely these are suggestive inquiries. They suggest our constant, and unmeasured, and unutterable indebtedness to the God that made and preserves us. We have never seen an end of His goodness. His mercies are new every morning. They descend upon us unceasingly. The stream is always flowing and always full. The Fountain never falls. He who sitteth in the heavens, and with whom is infinite fullness, never grows weary in *doing us good*. He gives, and we receive; He gives, and we receive—this is the story of our daily life. And when we look away from ourselves, we see that He sustains the same relation to others—the relation of a constant and untiring benefactor. The earth is full of His goodness. He gives to all and receives from none. So true is it that the best and the happiest Being in the universe is He who is ever engaged in dispensing happiness to His creatures. The greatest Possessor is the greatest Giver. *Giving* is His distinguishing glory. The most attractive and deeply affecting manifestation of His whole character recorded in the annals of time, is in the form of a *gift*. The touching and ever-memorable record is, that He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all. It is not without reason, therefore, that we say, giving assimilates us to Him. It is when we live, not for ourselves, but for the good of others, that our characters are most nearly conformed to His. And if we aim and desire to be more like Him than we are, then “to do good and to communicate” we must not forget, but, on the contrary, we must remember and lay to our hearts the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, “It is more blessed

to give than to receive." Blessed to give!—how blessed? It brings us nearer to the image and to the happiness of God.

2. *Giving improves our characters by increasing our benevolence.* It is an evident and a familiar principle that our virtues and our vices alike are invigorated by use, and weakened by disuse. They grow when they are frequently gratified; they dwindle when they are frequently repressed. This is as true of our desire to do good, to augment the welfare of our fellow-men, as of any other propensity. Benevolent feeling gratified is benevolent feeling increased; and, on the other hand, benevolent feeling ungratified is benevolent feeling diminished. The man whose great ambition is to receive, to accumulate, and who always forgets or refuses to give, is a man modeled after the narrowest pattern. He dwarfs himself by persistently stifling in his bosom every element of greatness. He gets smaller and smaller with the lapse of time. He lives in the smallest habitation that ever held and smothered a human soul—the cell of supreme selfishness. He does nothing beyond the limited circle where his own petty interests revolve, and, at length, the fact of his prolonged existence becomes a problem admitting of but one solution, and that is, that God spares him as a monument of His displeasure, a beacon and a warning to all the passers-by, sending out the perpetual admonition, "So fares the man who lives for himself alone—who receives but never gives." But how is it with him who yields to the promptings of benevolence? whose ear is ever heedful of the cry of the needy, and whose hand is ever ready to open for their relief?—the man who receives the blessings of heaven not merely for himself, but that he may use them for the good of others? How his heart enlarges just in proportion to

the frequency and the freeness of his gifts. The more he does for humanity, the more loves to do. The oftener his sympathies flow, the more pure and vigorous do they become. He was always a lovely character, it may be, but in devoting himself from day to day to some new work and labor of mercy, the lustre of his life increases. He goes from strength to strength. His attractions are numerous, his influence is salutary, and the space he fills is large. The world is manifestly the better and not the worse for his being in it. When the ear hears him, then it blesses him; and when the eye sees him, it gives witness to him: because he delivers the poor that crieth, and the fatherless, and him that hath none to help him. The blessing of him that is ready to perish comes upon him; and he causes the widow's heart to sing for joy. Contrast these two characters as you see them every day in society: the man who receives to hoard, and the man who receives to distribute—the man who lives to centre everything upon himself, and the man who lives to help and bless his fellows;—contrast the two. Look at the noble, unselfish spirit of the one, and at the narrow, contracted spirit of the other; look at the loveliness of the one, and at the odiousness of the other; at the growing beauty of the one, and the growing deformity of the other—and then, perhaps, you will see a deeper meaning than ever you have seen before in those words of the Lord Jesus, "It is more *Blessed* to give than to receive." Blessed to give!—and why blessed? Because giving enlarges the heart, strengthens within us the principle of benevolence, and thereby prepares us for the society and the employments of that better world, where "all the air is love."

3. Again: *Giving is a source of happiness—happiness true and pure.* There is such a thing as "the luxury of

doing good." Many, if not all, of the readers of this tract have found it, *felt* it, and if so, then you know it to be very great. Perhaps you have met a family in distress. Your heart was moved as you saw them struggling with poverty and sickness. Once and again you visited them in their affliction, and ministered to their comfort. You watched by the side of the sick and dying one. You smoothed the dying pillow. You opened your purse and supplied the many, many wants that met your eye and pained your heart in that narrow and lowly habitation. You continued to do so for days and weeks, it may be, till the stress of suffering was past, and you saw that your sympathy and alms were needed *there* no more. Is there any such chapter as this in the book of your earthly history? It is to be hoped there are many; but if there is one, then we may confidently ask, Were you not happy in performing that labor of love? Was it not a *jog*, full and unspeakable, which you felt, as you went forth from day to day to perform your errand of mercy? And then the memory of that mission—O how pleasant it is! You love to think of it. It will always be a bright and glad some recollection. It is one of the things the remembrance of which will plant no thorn in your dying pillow. On the contrary, from the bed of languishing you will revert to it with satisfaction, and your only regret will be that the whole line of your earthly life has not been brightened and beautified with similar deeds of charity. Or, perhaps, you have won a soul to Christ. You had an impenitent neighbor. Your spirit was troubled when you thought of his guilt and danger; and you determined to spare no effort if you might but lead him to the Saviour. You gave him your counsels and your prayers. You approached him again and again, and besought him in Christ's stead

to be reconciled to God. At last your prayers were answered; your efforts were crowned with success; the heart of that neighbor relented; he bowed at the foot of the Cross; and you were permitted to hail him as an heir with you of the grace of life. That was a precious and a blessed moment in your history. Yours then was the joy of one who feels that he has saved a soul from death. And now, as you see that man standing boldly up for Jesus, leading his family morning and evening to the altar of devotion, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless, throwing the whole weight of his influence into the right scale, and leading others around him to the Saviour—as you think of these things, and then see the tear of gratitude that glistens in his eye as he grasps your hand and says, “You, under God, have plucked my soul from ruin;”—then, then, if ever, you feel a happiness akin to the happiness of God and his Christ, and then you can understand what a fullness of meaning there was in the words of the Lord Jesus when He said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

4. Again: *Giving brings us within the range of many exceeding great and precious promises.* It is wonderful what rich and priceless blessings God has engaged to bestow upon those who are true to the claims of humanity, and devote their worldly possessions largely and liberally to the advancement of the cause of benevolence. Let us refresh our memories by recurring to a few plain and pointed passages, which may be regarded as accurately indicating the whole scope of scriptural teaching upon this momentous subject. “Trust in the Lord, and do good: so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.” “Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.” “Honest

the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine." "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth." "The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself." "He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will He pay him again." "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." "Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy." "If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday: and the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones; and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not." Surely these are exceeding great and precious promises. Giving to the needy with a cheerful heart and a bountiful hand brings us within the range of these promises, meets the terms upon which their fulfillment is suspended, and thereby secures to us the enriching benefits of which they speak, and which they hold up before us as a dissuasive from avarice and a motive to liberality. Nor let it be forgotten, that on the last great day, when a trembling world shall stand before its Judge to receive according to the deeds done here in the body, He who sits upon the throne will say unto them on His right hand, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat:"—O how the grace of

giving, of liberality, will then be magnified!—"I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me." And when the righteous, amazed that the Judge should represent *Himself* as having been the recipient of their beneficence, shall ask, "When saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?—when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? or when saw we thee sick or in prison, and came unto thee?"—His touching and deeply significant response will be, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Ah, then, assuredly, we shall never doubt again—though many a time we seem to doubt it now—that under the government of our redeeming God, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." More blessed to give—and why? Because, while the act itself assimilates us to God, improves our characters, and gives us the truest enjoyment, in the promise and purpose of Jehovah-Jesus there is a reward connected with it, and that reward will be glorious and everlasting.

5. Again: *Giving is, in an important sense, the moral and spiritual life of the world.* Suppose the great company of those who give of their substance for the spread of the Gospel and the deliverance of men from darkness, suffering, and degradation, were to stay their hands and give no more. What would be the result? Can any tongue or pen describe it? Is it in the power of language adequately to set forth the sudden and awful paralysis that would come upon all those benevolent agencies that are now diffusing light, and joy, and blessing among the nations? It would be like quenching, in a moment, the

last and dearest hopes of humanity. Our foreign missionaries would be recalled for the want of support. Our mission schools, and stations, and presses would be abandoned. The whole work of pagan evangelization would cease; and the millions of perishing heathen would be left to their idols and their debasement, with none to point them to the Saviour. The waste places in our own country would become doubly waste, because our domestic missionaries, a noble band, would either die at their posts for the lack of bread, or turn to secular employments for a livelihood. The religious press, that engine of power and mercy, would be crippled; our tract and Bible houses would be closed; our colporteurs would be obliged to resign their commissions and leave their labor of love; our pulpits would become vacant; all our charitable institutions would go down; and all the streams of heavenly influence that are now flowing forth in so many directions for the enlightenment, the relief, and the salvation of a dying world, would be dried at their very fountain. Surely this is a sad, dark picture; but if there were to be no more *giving*, it would very soon be realized. This is obvious enough. And so we are not mistaken when we say that giving is, in an important sense, the moral and spiritual life of the world. It is the great spring and promoter of progress. It always has been, and it always will be. Such is the economy of our redeeming God. Look at the Sandwich Islands—saved from idolatry and its concomitant pollutions, and lifted to the dignity and privileges of a Christian nation. What did it? The *gifts* of God's people. See the lights of Christianity here and there, as they are burning brightly and beautifully to-day on the dark shores of heathenism. What kindled them? The *gifts* of God's people. See those self-denying and true-hearted embas-

sadors of God, who, under the pressure of many trials and privations, are preaching Christ in the dark and destitute regions of our own country. What sustains them there? The gifts of God's people. See these churches, thousands upon thousands, scattered through the length and breadth of the land; and these ministers of the Gospel, preaching from Sabbath to Sabbath the unsearchable riches of Christ; and these Bible, tract, and Sunday-school societies, diffusing far and wide the leaves of the tree of life for the healing of the nations; and all the multiplied instrumentalities by which light is diffused, suffering is relieved, character is elevated, and souls are prepared for heaven. What built these churches? What supports these ministers? What sustains and keeps in motion all these great and benevolent and wonder-working agencies? *Gifts, gifts, gifts*—free-will offerings, love offerings, coming, for the most part, from those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, and who remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." When you can estimate the value of all these various agencies; when you can measure their glorious results as they shall one day be seen in the conversion of the world, and in the eternal salvation of uncounted myriads of precious souls,—then, but not till then, can you know and tell what a blessed thing it is to give.

In view of these considerations, ye disciples and friends of the Saviour, we who address you from time to time in His name, and as His ambassadors, feel no delicacy in asking you earnestly and often to give of your substance for the sustentation and advancement of the various objects of Christian benevolence. We tell you plainly that giving to these objects, as God has prospered you, is more than a duty—it is a *privilege*—a great and inestimable

privilege. It is *blessed* to give—more blessed than to receive. It is a part of our mission, as the ministers of Christ, to remind you of this—if need be, to convince you of this—and such, in this tract, is our sole and simple purpose. We do not hesitate to extend very often to those who wait upon our ministry the opportunity of showing their love to the Saviour by contributing of their substance for the advancement of His kingdom. We believe this is according to His will. In this matter we endeavor to act both conscientiously and carefully. We knowingly permit no objects to be urged upon you whose claims are even doubtful; no objects of which we cannot say, with perfect confidence, We know that they are worthy. And when such objects are presented, then what we ask is, that you will remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Give *freely*, because you have received freely, and because it is for Him who loved you and gave HIMSELF for you. Give *cheerfully*, for God loveth a cheerful giver. Give *according to your ability*, for He requireth of us according to that we have. Give *steadily, regularly, systematically*, because this is the Scriptural method, (1 Cor. 16: 2,) and it produces the largest results. Remember it is to your own advantage to be a frequent and a liberal giver. It assimilates you to God; it strengthens your benevolence; it promotes your happiness; it furnishes pleasant recollections for a dying hour; it secures to you the fulfillment of many precious promises; and it prepares you for a great reward in heaven. *Try to do something for every good cause.* Said Doctor Finley to an agent who asked him for a contribution to the particular object he was pleading, "I have but little to give; but I consider it a privilege and an honor, so far as the Lord allows, to have something,

if it be but a single nail, in every edifice that is going up for Christ." That's the spirit which the Master would have you to possess and to cultivate. Many edifices are being built for Him in our day; many noble and benevolent enterprises are planned and prosecuted for His glory. We bless Him that it is so. Invest as much as you can in them all. It is the best investment you can make, and, in the end, it will bring you the largest returns. Other investments may prove a failure, but what you give to the Redeemer is safe. When He comes to reckon with His servants He will remember it; from His judgment throne He will acknowledge it; and then, in His approving smile, in the welcome plaudit, "Well done, good and faithful servant," and in the bliss of heaven, holy, exalted, rapturous, and ineffable, you shall find your recompense and your reward.