

# The Disaster of the Dark Lamp

## Righteousness and Possessions Part 3

Matthew 6:22-23 2-6-11

This passage connects the immediate context about giving and generosity with the larger context of the chapter about hypocrisy vs pure motives. Your hidden attitudes and your way of looking at things will color all the data before it reaches your brain, so that you will never see things properly unless you have a generous, honest outlook. This message will alert your soul to the deadly dangers of greedy attitudes.

Excerpt 1:

There is something way down deep inside you – deeper than your mind - that gets a hold of all the facts before they come to your mind and colors them one way or another. So what your mind gets is never just the plain facts. What your mind gets are doctored facts that are colored in such a way as to point to a certain conclusion. And that thing deep down inside you – that grid through which all the facts pass and that colors them one way or another, is what Jesus calls your eyes—your outlook. It is that part of your heart where your motives and cravings and biases and attitudes are. When that thing deep down inside you decides that option A is out of the question, then when your mind makes its honest, unbiased appraisal of the facts those facts will always seem to clearly point in some other direction than option A.

I don't believe it is possible to override that. No matter how hard you try to be unbiased, we can't override it because it affects the data before the data gets to our rational mind. This is why it's so important to have a honest, generous outlook rather than a selfish one.

Excerpt 2:

When you look at people, look with both eyes. Normally, we use one eye to look at their needs and the other eye to watch out for our own selfish interests.

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>What is Light?.....</b>	<b>2</b>
The goal is light in the body .....	3
Light means perception bringing life and righteousness .....	3
<i>Perception</i> .....	3
<i>Spiritual life</i> .....	3
<i>Righteousness</i> .....	4
<b>What are good and bad eyes? .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Sincere eyes.....	5
Generosity is in the eyes.....	6
<i>Those who cannot give</i> .....	6
<b>How does selfishness hinder perception?.....</b>	<b>7</b>
Generosity or Greed Colors the Data .....	7
<i>Impossible to override</i> .....	7
<i>Interpreting the Bible</i> .....	8
<i>Wisdom</i> .....	8
<i>People</i> .....	8
Insanity .....	8
<b>Conclusion: Look with both eyes .....</b>	<b>9</b>
The needy.....	10
Benevolence and missions giving .....	10
<b>SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Q&amp;A QUESTIONS.....</b>	<b>11</b>

**Matthew 6:19 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and eating destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and eating do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! 24 "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.**

## Introduction

Randy Alcorn has a great way of summing up the principle in verses 19-20. “Imagine you are alive at the end of the Civil War. You are living in the South, but you are a Northerner. You plan to move home as soon as the war is over. While in the South you have accumulated lots of Confederate currency. Now, suppose you know for a fact that the North is going to win the war and the end is imminent. What will you do with your Confederate money? If you’re smart there’s only one answer. You should immediately cash in your Confederate currency for U.S. currency - the only money that will have value once the war is over. Keep only enough Confederate currency to meet your short term needs. As a Christian, you have inside knowledge of an eventual worldwide upheaval caused by Christ’s return. This is the ultimate insider trading tip: Earth’s currency will become worthless when Christ returns – or when you die, whichever comes first.”<sup>1</sup> We have been studying through the Sermon on the Mount and last week we began the section on what righteousness in Christ’s kingdom looks like when it comes to dealing with earthly treasures. And Jesus begins that section by alerting us to the fact that everything you have is about to become worthless. One hundred percent of your assets that are not converted into eternal currency will be lost. That is the first reason why we should not have anything at all in our earthly treasury. The second reason is in verse 21 – where your treasure is there your heart will be. That really makes it a serious issue because being a Christian is being married – your heart belongs to God alone. So giving your heart to anything in this world is adultery against God. Now, in verses 22-23 Jesus gives us a third reason not to have our treasure on earth. The third reason is this – you should not allow money or anything else in this world to become a treasure in your heart because of the disaster of a dark lamp.

## What is Light?

*What?*

**Matthew 6:22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.**

Now if you are like me, that is one of those verses you read and then say, “*What?* What in the world kind of random, out-of-the-blue statement is that? I thought we were talking about money and possessions – what does this have to do with that? Or is Jesus just abruptly changing the subject here and moving on to a new topic?” I don’t think Jesus is moving to a new topic, because the very next verse goes right back to money and possessions, and He keeps on that subject through the end of the chapter. So what in the world do verses 22-23 mean?

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<sup>1</sup> Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle, Discovering the Secret of Joyful Giving*, Multnomah Publishers, 2001. pp.13-14

## **The goal is light in the body**

Let's begin by making sure we see the main point, so we don't lose the forest for the trees when we dig into the details. I would venture that the main point is the first statement: **The eyes are the lamp of the body**. That is the first thing He says, and the rest of it just expands on that statement. So the main point that Jesus wants us to get is that the eyes are the lamp of the body. So the goal is to have the kind of eyes that result in the body being full of light. Whatever Jesus means by the body being full of light – it is a good thing, and being full of darkness is a bad thing. And it is your eyes that will make the difference.

So what does it mean to have your body be full of light? It sounds to me like Jesus is using the term “body” here in the same way He did back in chapter 5 when He said...

**Matthew 5:29 If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.**

The body is that which will be thrown into hell, so there the body refers to the whole self. And I do not see any reason to assume anything different here. What will be filled with light or darkness is your whole being. So what is the light and darkness?

## **Light means perception bringing life and righteousness**

### *Perception*

The simplest answer is that light represents perception. Very often in the Bible having light in one's eyes means to be able to see, and to have the eyes go dark means to go blind.

**Psalm 69:23 May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see (Ro.11:10)**

**Ephesians 1:18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you**

Light to the eyes means the ability to see and perceive and understand, and darkened eyes refers to inability to see and perceive and understand.

### *Spiritual life*

However, Jesus' main point is not the *eyes* having light, but rather the *body* (or the whole self) having light by means of the eyes. So what does it mean for the whole self to be full of light or darkness? Most of the time in Scripture that metaphor refers to spiritual life from God.

**Psalm 13:3 Look on me and answer, O LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death**

Life is the opposite of death, and living is the opposite of dying, so life, in Scripture, means a lot more than just having a pulse. The word life refers to all the various components of life - health, strength, fullness, energy, insight, hope, etc. – and especially joy. The components of life are all those things that are ebbing away when we say a person is in the process of dying. So one of the main components of life is health and strength.

**Psalm 38:7 there is no health in my body. 8 I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart. ... 10 my strength fails me; and the light has gone from my eyes.**

Light in the eyes represents all the various components of life, and since strength is one of the main components of life, loss of strength goes along with loss of light from the eyes. Another main component of life – one of the most important ones – is joy. And so light is used particularly often to describe joy.

**Esther 8:16 For the Jews it was a time of happiness (lit. light) and joy, gladness and honor.**

**Proverbs 15:30 The light of the eyes rejoices the heart**

And darkness goes along with sorrow.

**Job 16:16 My face is red with weeping, and darkness covers my eyes;**

**Job 17:7 My eyes have grown dim with grief; my whole frame is but a shadow.**

**Psalms 88:9 my eyes are faint with grief.**

So light coming into the eyes represents seeing and perception and understanding; and seeing and understanding result in spiritual life.

### ***Righteousness***

And spiritual life generates righteousness. And so very often light is used as a metaphor for righteousness.

**Matthew 5:16 let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.<sup>2</sup>**

So sometimes light points to perception, other times to spiritual life from God, and other times to righteousness. And that makes sense because all three of those go together. They are so intertwined that they are really inseparable. When you see things as they really are it increases your spiritual health, and that increases your righteousness. It is impossible to have righteousness without having spiritual health and strength and joy, and the only way to have spiritual health and strength and joy is to see things as they really are. And here is why: God commands that you desire good things, right? That is what righteousness is all about – desiring good things - the things that are truly beautiful and excellent. But if you cannot see that they are beautiful and good and satisfying, then you will never be able to desire them. God does not just call you to pray and read your Bible and worship and fellowship with His people and give generously and carry out the work of ministry and to love the saints – He requires you to *want* to do all that. And you are never going to desire those things until you can see how wonderful those things are. So the inability to see the way things really are makes righteousness impossible. And it destroys spiritual life and health. When you cannot see things as they really are you find you have a lot less strength. Instead of being strong so you can handle big-time suffering without any problem, you become weak, so you can hardly handle any suffering because you cannot see the truth about what God says regarding things like the value of suffering, and the promises that come along with our suffering. You cannot see the value of what God promises to give us during our suffering, and what is on the other side of the suffering. Instead of functioning in a powerful and effective way in your calling you limp along in an ineffective, unproductive pattern of failure because you cannot see the importance of the work, or the rewards connected with it. You cannot see the priorities of God, so you end up spinning your wheels majoring on unimportant things while

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<sup>2</sup> The idea that the metaphor of light is used in the same way in this statement and in the statement about the eyes being the lamp of the body is supported by the fact that in Luke the two statements appear together (Lk.11:33-36).

neglecting the most important things. When you cannot see things as they really are it drains the life out of you. It drains you of strength and joy and health and hope and all the other components of life. And as a result your righteousness and obedience to God decrease. And that is what Jesus means when He talks about your whole self being full of darkness. But being full of light means having a great measure of spiritual life and health, which increases your righteousness.

## What are good and bad eyes?

All that depends on whether your eyes are good or bad. So now the question is what does Jesus mean by good and bad eyes?

### Sincere eyes

“Good” and “bad” probably are not the best words to translate the Greek words. The most literal translation would be “sincere eyes” and “evil eyes.” We know what evil eyes are. That is a very common Jewish figure of speech to refer to greed or envy. We see that in both the Old Testament and New Testament as well as in extra-biblical literature (see Dt.15:9, Pr.23:6, 28:22, Mt.20:15,<sup>3</sup> Mk.7:22). The evil eye is when you look at people and things with a covetous or greedy or envious look. In other words, selfishness. On the other hand, in Proverbs 22:9 the phrase “good eye” is translated “generous.” In another place outside of Scripture the phrase “beautiful eye” was used to describe a generous person. So it was somewhat of an elastic figure of speech. An evil eye refers to greed and covetousness and a good or beautiful eye refers to generosity. So we can see now how this fits the context of what Jesus is talking about in this section.

But why does He say “If your eyes are sincere” rather than “If your eyes are good”? The Greek word is *aplous* (ἀπλοῦς), and here is what the Greek dictionary says: “being motivated by singleness of purpose so as to be open and aboveboard, single, without guile, sincere, straightforward i.e. without a hidden agenda.”<sup>4</sup> That is the most straightforward way to understand the word – to refer to sincerity. So why don’t most of the translations translate it that way? They opt for alternate translations because in their judgment the meaning “sincere” does not fit the context.<sup>5</sup>

When you translate you normally go with the most natural, common meaning of a word unless that meaning does not make any sense in the context, then you look for alternate definitions that make better sense. But do we really need to do that here? I would suggest that the normal definition of this word makes excellent sense in the context – if you just back up and consider the context of the whole chapter. The most straightforward reading of the text is this: “If the eye (your way of looking at earthly treasure) is aboveboard, sincere, straightforward, without a hidden agenda, then your whole body will be full of light.” Is there anything in the context of Matthew 6 that has to do with having sincere, honest, aboveboard motives without a selfish, hidden agenda? Yes – that is what the entire chapter has been about all the way from verse 1! Over and over Jesus says, “Don’t be like the hypocrites who have a hidden agenda of self-glorification.” Jesus has been preaching against selfish, mixed motives all through the chapter, so now when He turns to speak about treasure on earth it should not come as any surprise at all that He would say, “If you look at money and possessions and earthly treasures with selfish, mixed motives it will have a bad result., and if you look at possessions and money with pure,

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<sup>3</sup> In Matthew 20 Jesus told a parable about laborers who were hired at various times during the day to work in a vineyard. The ones who worked the entire day agreed ahead of time on a fair wage. Those hired later in the day did not discuss wages – they were just hired on and started working. When the end of the day came the employer paid everyone a full day’s wage, and the men who worked the longest got upset (even though that was the wage they agreed on). They were upset not because they were being underpaid, but because the other workers were being over paid. And here is the answer they got: Matthew 20:15 Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous? Literally it says, “Or is your eye evil because I am good?” That phrase “evil eye” is translated “envy” in Mark 7:22 as well.

<sup>4</sup> BDAG.

<sup>5</sup> For example, the ESV and NET translations take it to mean “healthy,” even though there is no instance anywhere in any Greek literature where the word means “healthy” (Kittle, vol.6, 556).

unmixed motives it will have a good result.” So there is no reason to look for an alternative translation of this word.

**Matthew 6:22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are sincere (without a selfish, mixed motive), your whole body will be full of light.**

And one other factor that supports that translation is the fact that there is another form of this Greek word that is used several times in the New Testament, and about half the time it means generous and the other half of the time it means sincere. So the idea of sincerity and generosity seems to me to be mixed together in this word. The truly generous man is sincere in that he deals with people without selfish motives.

### **Generosity is in the eyes**

What Jesus is doing here is showing us the connection between the immediate context of treasures and possessions, and the broader context of the whole chapter (which is about pure, unmixed motives). He is teaching us that generosity is a matter of the eyes – the way you look at things. It is a mistake to think generosity is simply a matter of what you do. Most people think that if you give a lot, then you are generous; if you do not give much, then you are stingy. But that is not always the case. Sometimes stingy people give. The Pharisees gave ten percent of all everything they got, but they were not generous. There are plenty of selfish motivations that can move stingy people to give, but their heart is still just as stingy as ever. That is why Proverbs warns us not to accept gifts from people like that.

**Proverbs 23:6 Do not eat the food of a stingy man (lit. evil eye), do not crave his delicacies; 7 for he is the kind of man who is always thinking about the cost. "Eat and drink," he says to you, but his heart is not with you. 8 You will vomit up the little you have eaten and will have wasted your compliments.**

The guy seems generous enough – he is giving you food. But even though he is doing that he is still stingy because of what he is thinking and feeling. Wisdom says do not even accept gifts from people like that because if they give you a meal, in their mind now you practically owe them your soul. In their selfish stinginess they imagine what they gave you is such a huge gift and huge sacrifice for them that now you really owe them, and they will now treat you as if you are indebted to them.

So the issue of stinginess vs. generosity is not just a matter of your actions – it is a matter of what is in your heart. It is a matter of your spiritual eyes – the way you look at things and people. That is why Jesus speaks about generosity rather than mere giving. He is always concerned about the heart, not just the external actions, so instead of talking about giving He talks about having a generous eye. You could routinely give away seventy percent of your income, but if you do it with a stingy eye, the only reward you will get for all that giving is a whole lot of darkness in your life.

This is why God loves a cheerful giver. Cheerful giving is the only kind of giving that counts as real giving. Grudging giving, reluctant giving, giving that feels to you like loss rather than gain – is not true generosity. If it is not driven by joy then it is coming from a selfish heart rather than a generous heart (an evil eye rather than a sincere eye), and so it is worthless.

### ***Those who cannot give***

That is bad news for stingy, selfish givers, but it is great news for those of you who have generous eyes but cannot give. There are some of you who really would give if you could, and you prove that by giving as much as you can even with the little you have, but you wish you could give more. I think of wives whose husbands will not let them give. Sometimes you have a Christian wife and a non-Christian husband, and he will not let her put anything in the offering or do anything to help the poor. But it is in her heart to do it. And if she could she would do it in a heartbeat. And whatever resources

she does control – her time, her energy, her talents – she is generous with those things. Or the pocket change she can carry around – she will give up a trip to Starbucks or whatever so she can give that. And she would give a lot more if she could, but it is out of her hands. That woman’s life will be full of light, because the light that Jesus speaks of here goes not to the givers per se, but to anyone who looks at people and things with generous eyes rather than selfish eyes. So it is possible to be the biggest giver in the church and have your life full of darkness and for someone else to give \$2 a week and their life is full of light.

## **How does selfishness hinder perception?**

### **Generosity or Greed Colors the Data**

Now, why is that? Of all the benefits that Jesus might promise to generous people, why light? What is the connection between generous eyes and spiritual perception? Or to put it negatively, in what way does greed prevent you from seeing things as they really are? The answer to that question is an extremely important principle for the Christian life. Most of us imagine that our perception of truth is a function of the mind, more than anything else. We gather the facts, weigh them rationally, and we count on our minds to discern from that what is true.

That is not how it works. There is something way down deep inside you – deeper than your mind - that gets a hold of all the facts before they come to your mind and colors them one way or another. So what your mind gets is never just the plain facts. What your mind gets are doctored facts that are colored in such a way as to point to a certain conclusion. And that thing deep down inside you – that grid through which all the facts pass and that colors them one way or another, is what Jesus calls your eyes. It is that part of your heart where your motives and cravings and biases and attitudes are. When that thing deep down inside you decides that option A is absolutely out of the question, then when your mind makes its honest, unbiased appraisal of the facts those facts will always seem to clearly point in some other direction than option A.

### ***Impossible to override***

And I don’t believe it is possible to override that. I have seen it in my own life. I have seen it in my interpretations of Scripture. I try my absolute hardest to interpret a passage of Scripture going only by the facts, without any prejudice one way or another, and the facts point me toward a certain interpretation. And then, years later, when my attitudes toward certain things have changed, I study it again and realize my interpretation was wrong. The facts did not really point to it, but I thought they did because various values and attitudes inside me colored the facts before they ever reached my mind.

Now at first this might be terrifying to you. The idea that you cannot count on your mind to arrive at the right conclusion or to be completely objective – that is scary. It is scary because you think, “If I can’t count on my intellect, then how can I be sure that my interpretations of the Bible and my understanding of truth are correct?” Answer – the only way is to see to it that that thing deep down inside you that colors all the facts is healthy. If that thing is functioning properly then it will color the facts in the right way so your mind will arrive at the right conclusions.

What is that thing deep down inside that colors the facts? Jesus shows us what it is by using the metaphor of eyes. It is your way of looking at things and people. Maybe a good word to describe it would be the word “outlook.” What is your outlook on life? If it is a selfish, greedy outlook then all the facts are going to be colored the wrong way and you will not be able to discern what is true. But if it is an honest, generous outlook then you will see clearly.

Last week we found that your earthly treasury is made up of all those things that you treasure – things you feel you have to have in order to be happy, but that will not exist a million years from now. So the goal is to empty out your earthly treasury completely so there is nothing in there. It is important to do that for three reasons: Earthly treasure will all be lost. Where your treasure is there your heart

will be. And now a third reason – You should empty your earthly treasury because the more things you have in your earthly treasury the more it will distort your spiritual vision. If you think you have to have money in order to be happy, or a certain relationship, or a certain job or whatever, then your “need” for those things will color all the facts. And there are three different kinds of facts – Bible facts, wisdom facts, and people facts. If you have a selfish outlook you will come to wrong conclusions when you interpret the Bible, when you try to use wisdom, and when you interact with people.

### ***Interpreting the Bible***

Any time a certain passage starts to look like it is going to have implications that will put your earthly treasure at risk, your heart will color all the data so that when your mind goes to interpret the passage it will come up with the wrong interpretation. If your eyes are greedy or covetousness or envious or selfish, your eyes will go dark and your whole self will be full of darkness, which means when you try to understand God’s Word you will not be able to. There are people who cannot understand what the Bible says about divorce because one of the things they treasure – one of the things in their earthly treasury – is the option of leaving their spouse if things get too hard. If you have anything in this world that you treasure – anything in your earthly treasury – then whenever you try to understand God’s Word – especially when it speaks about that thing – the lights will go out and you will not be able to interpret it correctly.

### ***Wisdom***

And the same is true for wisdom. When you try to make wisdom decisions and discern how God is leading you, you will pray, “God, please, guide me. Show me Your will. Show me the wise path here.” And no matter how much you pray that, you will not be able to see the wise path. There are people who are begging God for direction and wisdom but they are just as lost as ever and they make one bad decision after another and get into all kinds of problems simply because what is deep down inside them – the attitudes of the heart – the way their eyes look at things is selfish and greedy rather than generous so all their vision is clouded. They say, “Show me Your will, God” and God says, “OK,” and shows them a path that leads to selling their house and downsizing so they can give support to some important missionary work, but their eyes look at their house in such a way that it makes it impossible for them to see that as God’s will. They say, “Show me Your will” and so God shows them that His will is to break off a certain relationship, or to quit their job, but their eyes look at that relationship or that job as treasure, and letting go of it is out of the question (because your treasure is that which you must have to be happy), so they just cannot seem to discern God’s guidance. If the equation before you is 2+2, but something deep down inside you rejects 4 as a possible answer, then no matter how many PhD’s you get in mathematics it will be an impossible equation to solve.

### ***People***

So you are cut off from the truth of Scripture, you are cut off from access to wisdom and guidance, and you are also cut off from the truth when it comes to relationships with people. You will constantly misread people, misunderstand people, misconstrue their words and actions, misinterpret their motives. When you have selfish eyes, it makes it seem like people who are showing you love and kindness are actually being mean to you. It seems like everyone is inconsiderate. You will bounce from church to church to church because everywhere you go people are unloving toward you. And you will leave behind you a trail of broken relationships wherever you go because you are incapable of seeing the truth of what is going on.

### ***Insanity***

Do you see why I titled this sermon “The *Disaster* of the Dark Lamp”? Jesus concludes this section by saying ...**and if the light within you is darkness how great is that darkness!** And if the

only lamp in the house emits nothing but darkness, you have a huge, huge, darkness problem. This is worse than blindness. It is more like schizophrenia. You see, the function of eyesight is to enable you to perceive the world around you, right? You walk into a pitch-dark room, you have no idea what is in there, but then someone flips on the light and instantly you know one thousand facts about that room. So in that sense light is your connection to reality. Having the lights go out cuts you off from reality. And that is what schizophrenia means – detachment from reality. Blind people are not really detached from reality because they have other senses. They can perceive the world around them through their hearing and touch, and all that. But the insane person is detached from reality. They see things and hear things and feel things that are not there. What they think is happening is not happening, and they are not capable of knowing what actually is happening. They do not know what is real and what is not. And that is the situation Jesus is describing. When selfishness creeps into your outlook you have a huge, huge darkness problem. You are not just blind – you are spiritually insane and cut off from the real world without any remedy. It is a terrible fate. If I asked for a show of hands I am sure everyone here, if you had to choose between blindness and insanity, would choose blindness. It is a horrible thing to be disconnected from reality. No wonder Paul said:

**1 Timothy 6:9 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.**

That is another way of saying your whole life will be full of darkness.

## **Conclusion: Look with both eyes**

So, how do you change that thing that is deep down inside of you – your way of looking at people and things – to make your heart more generous? Jesus says it is by having a sincere eye – an eye that looks without selfish motives. It is really simple - when you look at people and things, make sure you are looking at them and not partly at them and partly at yourself. Our temptation is to use one eye to look at others and keep the other eye on our own comforts. So you see some earthly treasure and your way of looking at it says, “How could that add to my comfort?” Not, “How could that be used for the kingdom?” or “How worthless is that thing in the light of eternity?” or “How could that thing be used to love people?” The first thought is, “How could that thing make my life nicer?” And the next thing you know all of life is just an effort to push the limits on luxury and indulgence in earthly treasures. How nice a vacation should we take? How much can we afford? However much money is available – that is how much we will spend – maybe more. How nice of a house should I buy? What is the maximum they will let me borrow? What kind of refrigerator should I get? Which model has the all the features that I want? If I have the money, that is what I get.

In fact in many cases we get it even if we do not have the money. They advertise zero percent financing so we buy things we do not even have the money for, assuming we will have extra money in the future. We were not able to set aside extra money in the past, but we are so sure that we will have extra money in the future that we go into debt for a luxury. People borrow money for depreciating items like cars. We live in a culture where the mere fact that you do not have enough money to buy something is no hindrance whatsoever in purchasing it. Then we turn around and say, “I’m sorry, God, I can’t help that person or support that missionary because it’s all I can do every month just to make all my payments on all the things I borrowed to obtain.”

A generous eye will live on less than one hundred percent of your income so you can give. A greedy eye will use up one hundred percent of your income for yourself. And in our culture we have even gone beyond that to where we are spending *more* than our income. I am not saying it is always because of greed that we get into debt, but I am saying that very often that is the case. Very often it is because our eyes look at things with a view toward maximizing personal comfort.

And that completely short-circuits generosity because when you look at things the wrong way you will also look at people the wrong way. You see a person in need and instead of just focusing both eyes on their need, one eye is busy analyzing the impact it will have on your own comfort if you help that person. And the price you pay for that little effort to preserve your comfort is that your whole life fills up with darkness. But if you can focus both your eyes on the needy person, and you let God worry about your comfort, your life will fill up with light. Generous people are generous because they are able to focus both eyes on the needs of people. They have an acute awareness of need. When they look at someone they look at that person, consider what life is like for that person, imagine how that person's hard situation feels, and before long their compassion wells up and drives them to share and meet that person's need.

### **The needy**

And I realize Jesus does not say anything in this verse about who you give to, but we know from the rest of His teaching that there is a special emphasis on giving to those in need. Back at the beginning of the chapter He spoke of giving to the poor. Giving to the poor is emphasized because the poor cannot repay you, so there is less chance of a selfish motive.

**Luke 14:12 Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."**

### **Benevolence and missions giving**

Last week in the Agape 101 class someone asked about designated giving at Agape. And I told them that in general we discourage designated giving because it usurps the role of the leadership of the church. We should trust the leadership to decide how money is spent in the church, not dictate to them how it must be spent. Of course the leaders are always eager to hear your suggestions, and we almost always end up agreeing with those suggestions, but we ask that you leave it as a suggestion, not a demand. So we discourage designated giving – most of the time.

However there are two exceptions to that, and one is benevolence giving. We actually encourage you to write separate checks for your regular offering and benevolence offering. We do that because there is such an emphasis in Scripture on giving to the needy, we want you to be able to give some money that you know for sure will not go to pay the utility bill or purchase paper towels or anything other than helping the needy. Now, if you want, you could just give money to the needy directly, without going through the church. There is certainly nothing wrong with that. Personally I like doing it through the church because most of the time when people are needy they need a lot more than what I can give. But if everyone gives, say, two or three percent of their income to the benevolence fund then when people get in trouble we are able to help them. And it is fitting that this should come up in today's sermon because today is the first Sunday of the month, which is the day we remind you each month about the benevolence offering.

Our giving should rise from a heart that shares the priorities and affections of God. This strikes right at the heart of the gospel itself. Jesus emptied Himself of His riches for us, and we are to follow His example.

**1 John 3:17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?**

Greed is a mark of unbelief. But when you have both eyes on the person and his need without regard for your own comfort in this life, the lights go on and your whole life floods with light. You see

things as they really are, your perceptions are more accurate, your life increases in all the components of life from God (health and strength and energy and hope and joy), and all that brings a harvest of righteousness and eternal reward.

**Benediction: Isaiah 58:5 Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? 6 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: ... 7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-- when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? 8 Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. 9 Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.**

## Summary

The eyes (outlook – way of looking at money and people) are the lamp of the body in that when they are sincere (no selfish motives – generous) the whole body (self) is filled with light (perception leading to spiritual life and health leading to righteousness). Evil eyes (greed, envy) make the lights go out, which cuts you off from reality.

## Q&A Questions

- 1) What if you fear the person will misuse a gift or you are concerned it might be unloving to give a gift? Is that a mixed motive, or is it proper?
- 2) If I'm confused about Scripture, is it always because of greed or a bad motive?
- 3) If I'm greedy in one area, will that just hinder my understanding in that area, or across the board?
- 4) How do I improve my attitudes such that my filter allows clear vision and understanding?
- 5) How do you look at a need "with both eyes" and still do it for reward? If I have an eye on reward, isn't that a mixed motive?