

Reliable Incentive

To help him succeed in his global mission, God wisely does not appeal solely (if at all) to our emotions – to our gratitude, devotion, benevolence or loyalty. For those who help him get his job done on earth, he chooses a more reliable, consistent incentive. It has to do with his faithfully and fairly compensating us in heaven. This will be in the form of position, riches and power.

Don't let God's very human way of working with us humans bewilder you. Remember: God became one of *us*. He speaks *our* language. He knows our psychology. He relates to us in our present flawed condition, not to our future perfect state. (We haven't yet arrived spiritually, even though we sometimes think we have.) He works with us *where* we are, *as* we are. He knows how best to motivate us. If the Lord relied on human gratitude to get his work done, he could, at best, count on a one-out-of-ten response.

Yes, of course, love, gratitude, obedience and enthusiasm ought to permeate every part of our everyday Christian life. But none of these good emotions are biblically prescribed incentives for doing good deeds. The main thing is that you are doing a lot of good. You are optimizing the use of your spiritual gifts within and through the body of Christ. If you believe it is your *love* for God and for people that drives you to do good deeds, so be it! If you think your *gratitude* is what arouses you to action, fine! Just keep in mind that Jesus never said, "Love me and serve me out of gratitude." If gratitude could make us love and serve the Lord the way he expects us to, there would not have been a need for him to *command* us to do so. And it's not our own love, anyway. The love God wants us to use in loving him and others is the "...love [he] has poured out...into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

Personally, I don't believe God wants us to practice stewardship purely out of love or gratitude. If love and gratitude are such reliable motivators of God's children, then why is the legitimate work of the Lord always short of resources – human and material? Every born-again believer claims to gratefully love the Lord. Reality says loving gratitude is seldom translated into adequate, long-term living and giving.

Unfortunately, what the Macedonian churches did (*joyfully they gave beyond their ability*) was a rare phenomenon – even in the early church. God was able to inspire them, because they first gave *themselves* wholeheartedly to him. But *emotions* are not the most dependable, not the most stimulating treasure-storing motivators. An attractive, practical, human incentive was needed. Jesus hopes to inspire you with reliable assurances of liberal, lasting treasures in heaven for *being* good and for *doing* good.

Is he succeeding? Are you succeeding? ◇◇◇