

What Does the Bible Say about Publicizing and Comparing the Giving, Baptism, and Attendance Numbers of Churches and Believers?

It is a common occurrence in Western church contexts to see the public displays and announcements of baptism, attendance, and giving numbers in churches. Have you noticed any such or similar practices?

- Evangelists or pastors talking about how many they've "saved" or "baptized"
- Giving plaques attached to every "donated" or "funded" item in a church.
- Funded accounts or buildings with the names of givers attached.
- Sunday school attendance pins, awards and ribbons.
- Churches recognized for rapid attendance or baptism growth.
- Associations listing and comparing the attendance, baptism, or giving records between churches.
- Denominations awarding and recognizing high givers, baptizers, or giving milestones among churches.

Such means may have originated and be common and helpful in the business, entertainment, or sports worlds and the end goals and intents of such practices may be good, to encourage and promote growth.

The question we should be asking is whether these practices are biblical?

At best, the practice of making baptism, attendance, and giving numbers public or comparative can be unwise and dangerous.

At worst, the practice of making baptism, attendance, and giving numbers public or comparative can be worldly and demonic.

*"But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts,
do not boast and be false to the truth.*

*This is not the wisdom that comes down from above,
but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.*

*For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist,
there will be disorder and every vile practice."*

James 3:14–16 (ESV)

While not everyone who has been part of such practices has been tempted towards jealousy, covetousness, or pride we should still evaluate such practices within churches and denominations.

"All things are lawful,' but not all things are helpful.

'All things are lawful,' but not all things build up."

1 Corinthians 10:23 (ESV)

Here are some Scriptures to consider regarding the practice of counting, publicizing, and comparing baptism, attendance, and giving numbers in churches or believers:

- **Boast Only In Knowing the Lord** - Jeremiah 9:24 “but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.” (ESV)
- **David Proudly Counts Numbers, Incited by Satan, Warned by Joab** - 1 Chronicles 21:1–3 “Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel. [2] So David said to Joab and the commanders of the army, “Go, number Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, and bring me a report, that I may know their number.” [3] But Joab said, “May the LORD add to his people a hundred times as many as they are! Are they not, my lord the king, all of them my lord’s servants? Why then should my lord require this? Why should it be a cause of guilt for Israel?”
- **David Repents for the “Foolishness” of Numbering Israel, Israel Suffers 70,000 Deaths as a Consequence** - 2 Samuel 24:10 “But David’s heart struck him after he had numbered the people. And David said to the LORD, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have done very foolishly.”
- **Caution Against Publicizing Righteous Works** - Matthew 6:1 “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.”
- **Give in Secret, Command to Let Your Giving be Private** - Matthew 6:2–4 “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. [3] But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, [4] so that your giving may be in secret.”
- **Motivation for Generous Giving to be God’s Reward & Recognition** - Matthew 6:4 “And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”
- **Pray in Secret, Watch for Hypocrisy** - Matthew 6:5–6 “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. [6] But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”
- **Fast in Secret, Watch for the Temptation to Get Attention** - Matthew 6:16–18 “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. [17] But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, [18] that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”
- **Small Amount of Individual, Secret Giving Is Praised, All She Had to Live On** - Mark 12:41–44 “And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. [42] And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. [43] And he called his disciples to him and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. [44] For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

- **Public Praise of Generous Giving Is Given to a Region of Churches, Out of Severe Affliction and Extreme Poverty** - 2 Corinthians 8:1–4 “We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, [2] for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. [3] For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, [4] begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints”
- **Paul Confronting and Rebuking Believers for Boasting in Particular Groups, Followings, or Leaders:**
 - 1 Corinthians 1:10–17 “I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. [11] For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. [12] What I mean is that each one of you says, “I follow Paul,” or “I follow Apollos,” or “I follow Cephas,” or “I follow Christ.” [13] Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? [14] *I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius*, [15] so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. [16] (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) [17] For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.”
 - **Commands Not to Boast** - 1 Corinthians 1:29–31 “so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ... ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’”
 - **Reminder that All Spiritual Growth is From God** - 1 Corinthians 3:5–7 “What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.”
 - **Command Not to Boast in the Names of Men** - 1 Corinthians 3:21 “So let no one boast in men.”
 - **Warning of Pride** - 1 Corinthians 4:6–7 “that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. ... What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?”
 - **Reminder that All Spiritual Gifts, Service, & Activities are Empowered by God** - 1 Corinthians 12:4–6 “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.”
 - **Instruction to Understand Rightly Who Is Honorable** - 1 Corinthians 12:22–24 “On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor ... But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it”
 - **Love Does Not Envy or Boast** - 1 Corinthians 13:4 “love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant”
 - **The Danger of Seeking the Approval of Others** - Galatians 1:10 “For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.”
 - **Jealousy & Selfish Ambition Is Earthly, Unspiritual, and Demonic** - James 3:14–16 “But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.”