

## “More Blessed to Give?”—Acts 20:32-35

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “More Blessed to Give?”, is Acts 20:32-35 → *Now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He Himself said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

*It is more blessed to give than to receive.* When one combines giving, receiving and blessing all in the same breath it is interesting the concepts of giving which flow from the minds and lips of people. Many will praise the blessings of giving to others because it make them feel good to know that they’ve helped someone in some way. Others will expound on the blessings they will receive back from the LORD because they were so generous in giving or serving. Some will even see their “sacrificial” giving or serving as meriting the blessings of God to such an extent that they will interpret adversity as a sign of

God's disfavor upon them. So . . . what do these words of Jesus—*It is more blessed to give than to receive*—actually mean?

Our text records the Apostle Paul's "farewell address" to the elders of Ephesus who met him at Miletus while on his way to Jerusalem. Based upon some revelation of the Holy Spirit, Paul thought that this was probably the last time these pastors would see his face. (cf. Acts 20:23-25) Certainly persecution and imprisonment awaited him as he had experienced so often while striving to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with others. Now, after nearly twenty years of ministry with the Jews seeking his life, death could be a real possibility as he entered into the heart of Judaism, Jerusalem itself. Throughout this "farewell address" he shared in what way it was *more blessed to give than to receive*.

The blessings of giving begin with being given the blessings. The whole of the Christian life is gift in its purest form! We celebrate it at Christmas. No, not the gifts under the Christmas tree but the baby called Jesus in the manger. It flows from God's love as expressed in John 3:16 → *God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life*. What makes this gift giving in its purest form? It flows from the heart of God **to the heart of sinners!** It is giving to undeserving, rebellious, ungrateful, arrogant, filthy, dirty rotten sinners who are experts at either taking advantage of the gift or throwing it back in His face. Paul could relate. Having

experienced the gift of God's forgiveness and grace when God should have sent him immediately to hell, move Paul to give the blessings of this grace to others freely.

He spoke about not taking people's money or clothing saying in verse 34 of our text: *You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me.* As Paul and his companions traveled from town to town they wanted to make sure the people with whom they were giving the gift of God's grace in Jesus Christ would receive their message as a pure gift. Even though *the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel* (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:14) Paul also said about he and Barnabas in 1 Corinthians 9:12 → *Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.* They wanted the people to whom they were ministering to focus on the blessings they have been given in God's forgiveness and grace in Jesus. How could being paid for their labor, a valid right indeed, *put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ?*

It can happen in many ways. 1 Timothy 6:10 describes *the love of money as a root of all kinds of evil*, one of which is empowerment. Maybe you've heard it said: "He who holds the purse, holds the power." My dad used to say it this way: "You live under my roof and I pay the bills—you follow my rules!" Many act

as if supplying others with money gives them the right to tell them what to do, how to do it and treat them any way they wish. This is a dangerous attitude when it comes to the Church of Jesus Christ. What happens when those who pay those who proclaim the very Word of God listen and then refuse to obey it? Hebrews 13:17 says: *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.* Apparently it will affect their bringing the blessings of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to you and others.

**Every** Christian should submit to God's Word. Why? Because **every** Christian has been given the blessings of grace, forgiveness and eternal life **freely** in Jesus! This is why Paul told these pastors in verse 32 of our text: *I commend you to God and **to the word of His grace**, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.*

Conversely, the *love of money can put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ* when those who preach appear to be proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ only to get money. Even though we are not privy to the motives of others, many have found the appeals for money in the name of Jesus and the Gospel to contradict the message of God's free blessings in Christ Jesus. Instead of telling people they should give because God has freely given His forgiveness

and grace to them, could they not simply hold out the Gospel, proclaim it and let the Holy Spirit produce the giving? The focus can appear to be controlling the grace, the giving and even the Holy Spirit Himself! Thus, Paul chose to support himself as a tent maker and offer the gospel free of charge. (cf. Acts 18:3; 1 Corinthians 9:3-18)

Paul said in verse 35 of our text: *In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He Himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive. Who are these weak people who need help? They are people struggling with their sin. They are people feeling the affects of sin in suffering, pain, catastrophe and trials of various kinds. They are people caught in the clutches of idolatry, enslaved by their own selfish pleasures and desires. They are . . . you and me. You and I are the weak who need the blessings which only pure love can gift in a pure way. God gives us His forgiveness of sins, eternal life and a life of freedom under His Holy Spirit's guidance each day because of the Person & Work of Jesus!*

This affects our attitudes and practices of giving. We don't need to be coerced into giving with the offering of getting something in return. That is not giving. It's what the world calls a "business deal." We've already been given all that's necessary for life in Christ! As Jesus says in Matthew 10:8 → *Freely you have receive, freely give.* (NIV) We don't need to be given "kudos" or have our

egos “stroked” in order to give. That’s what the world calls “bait and switch.” God’s Word says in 1 Corinthians 3:22-23 *all things are yours, and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s!* We’ve already been given all things in Christ! We don’t give based upon the results of the gift. That’s what the world calls “marketing.” Rather, we are *steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord our labor is not in vain.* (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:58) The results belong to God, not to us! Thus, we do not give expecting to be recognized for our gift and our service. That’s what the world calls a “paycheck.” Rather, we desire to follow God’s Word as expressed in 1 Corinthians 10:31 → *Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

Blessed to be a blessing! Blessed by God’s pure love for us sinners so that we might be a blessing by giving that same pure love to other sinners. That’s why *it is more blessed to give than to receive.* We, along with the angels of heaven, rejoice when a sinner repents of his sins and trusts in Jesus’ perfect payment for his sins on the cross! (cf. Luke 15:4,10) We rejoice and praise God because the blessing of God’s grace in Jesus Christ has gone out to others and God our heavenly Father is glorified! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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