

Giving is Receiving

Acts 20:35

There can be no doubt that we live in a selfish and inward focused world. The majority today have little concern for the needs of others, and few are willing to make any sacrifices to benefit someone else. Dr. Adrian Rogers described the mentality of many today. “They get all they can and can all they get.”

As we continue to discuss some of the paradoxes in Christian life, I was reminded that one must be willing to give in order to receive. We must be willing to turn loose of particular aspects of life and material gain in order to grow in our faith and receive the greater spiritual blessings. Jim Elliot was a missionary to Ecuador. He is quoted as saying, “*He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.*” His quote is especially powerful when we consider that Jim was murdered by the natives he sought to reach with the Gospel. He completely gave what he could not keep but gained something he could not lose – eternal life in Christ.

Our text comes from an important and emotional time in the life of Paul. He had gathered the elders of Ephesus, desiring to offer final instructions prior to his departure. Ephesus was dear to his heart, and Paul knew he would likely never see them again. There is much he could have shared, and yet he chose to offer these parting words. As we consider the [instructions](#) of Paul, I want to think on the paradox: [Giving is Receiving](#).

I. The Practice of Giving (35a) – [I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak](#). As Paul prepared to depart Ephesus, he spoke to them regarding the practice of giving. He knew such activity was an important aspect of their Christian lives and ministry. Notice:

A. The Example – [I have shewed you all things](#). Paul was not one who failed to practice what he preached. He put forth much effort in modeling the Christian life before the church. He didn’t want to be guilty of only proclaiming what was expected; he was committed to living out the principles of the faith. Giving for the good of others was no exception. Paul reminded them that he had showed them all things regarding their walk with the Lord. He had been willing to give sacrificially for the good of others and the benefit of the church. We know that Paul was what we now call a bi-vocational pastor. He worked as a tent maker in order to provide his living and was willing to give of his blessings to help others.

- As we think of giving for the good of others, Paul is one in a long list of those who sacrificed in order to be a blessing to those in need. There is no greater example of sacrificial giving than that of our Lord, Jesus Christ. We will consider His great sacrifice in a moment, but we have been

left a legacy of giving. We will never be all the Lord desires of us if we are unwilling to give of our blessings in order to benefit someone else. Clearly this involves much more than monetary giving, but we cannot exclude monetary gifts. Paul worked and gave for the benefit of the church. It is a blessing to be able to give a tithe and offering unto the Lord in order to help finance the ministries of the church and ensure the Gospel is proclaimed throughout the world. It is an old cliché and yet it remains true – you cannot out give God!

B. The Expense (35a) – *I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak.* Paul did not refer to a gift of little consequence. He honestly spoke of giving until it hurts. He was not instructing the church at Ephesus to give of their leftovers, but actually be willing to make a genuine sacrifice for the good of the church and others. The word laboring in the text has the idea of “*laboring to the point of exhaustion and fatigue, being worn out.*” Surely these words carried great weight coming from Paul. He had given his life in ministry to Christ, sacrificially serving the church. He was always willing to go the extra mile in an attempt to benefit others and share the Gospel. He was not asking them to do anything he had been unwilling to do himself.

- This is quite convicting when we pause to consider the enormity of Paul’s words. Most of us are willing to give of our excess, but few are willing to give until it hurts. We are willing to serve the church and others as long as it’s convenient and fits our schedule. How many are willing to labor for the Lord to benefit others until we are exhausted with fatigue? Remember the words of Jim Elliot - *He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.*

C. The Extent (35a) – *I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak.* Paul revealed the emphasis of their sacrificial giving – it was to be done in an effort to support the weak. It would be impossible to consider these words and miss the need and command for financial giving. Their gifts were to be given in order to meet the needs of those who were less fortunate. Paul knew meeting material needs would be a great avenue through which the Gospel could be shared. He was burdened for the weak and felt obligated to help alleviate their suffering.

- There are many aspects of Christian ministry, and all are important, but we cannot ignore the material and financial needs that surround us. The world is often skeptical of the church, but it cannot argue with those who are willing to give of themselves for the good of others. Such support must include financial giving, but it cannot be limited to that. Often it is much easier to put a little money in an offering than it is to actually give of our time and talents for the good of others. The church has a wonderful opportunity, and obligation, to advance the Gospel through ministry to the weak and less fortunate. Speaking of love isn’t enough; we must show our love!

D. The Expectation (35a) – I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak. Paul also revealed his expectation for such giving and ministry to those in need. He had not offered words for the church to consider; this was given as an expectation. He fully expected the church at Ephesus to follow his example and give tirelessly for the good of others! The words ought in the text reveals this action was *necessary and must be fulfilled*.

- Baptist get nervous when someone talks about giving. Many think that they have earned their money and no one else has a right to interfere with their decisions about how it is spent or used. I cannot make anyone give and wouldn't if I could. Although I am convinced giving is commanded and that it honors God, one must give from a cheerful heart and for the right reasons. If you give to please the pastor or in an effort to bargain with God, you might as well keep your gift. 2 Cor.9:6-7 – But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. ^[7] Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. The principles of farming apply to giving as well. Our harvest has a direct correlation to that which we sow. If we sow sparingly, there will be a meager harvest. If we sow abundantly, we can expect a much better return for our efforts. God doesn't want us to give grudgingly or because we feel it is demanded and expected; He wants us to give with a cheerful heart because we genuinely desire to give.

- Our willingness to give also stands as a good indicator of our faith and commitment to the Lord. James 2:15-18 – If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, ^[16] And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? ^[17] Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. ^[18] Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. If we are to please the Lord, following Him by faith, we must be willing to give in an effort to support the weak and less fortunate.

II. The Precept in Giving (35b) – remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. Here Paul revealed the great precept in giving – it is more blessed to give than to receive. Through our giving we actually receive much. This is one of the great paradoxes in Christian life. Notice:

A. The Reminder (35b) – Paul challenged the church to remember these words of Jesus. I will admit that this particular quote is not recorded in the gospels, but it was known and regarded by many of the early believers. While we don't have this actual quote, there are references where Jesus spoke and revealed this principle for giving. Matt.10:8 – Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. Granted, this command refers more to

others aspects of the faith than of monetary gifts, the principle remains – they had received much and were expected to freely give of that which they had received. **Matt.25:37-40 – Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? ^[38] When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? ^[39] Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? ^[40] And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me.** As we give from our abundance of blessing, we are in essence giving unto the Lord, regardless of the recipient of our gifts. Serving and giving unto others is an act of service to Christ!

B. The Reward (35b) – remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, **It is more blessed to give than to receive.** Clearly, we understand one significant principle our Lord taught – it is much better to have blessing with the ability to give than to be in need and depend on the kindness of others. While I don't seek to minimize this eternal truth, I think there is more here that we need to consider. The Lord will honor those who are willing to give of their abundance in order to help others. Through our giving we receive the blessing of God. That should never be our motivation, but it is a byproduct of giving from a sincere heart. As we give as unto the Lord, He honors and blesses our efforts. The treasures we lay up in heaven will far exceed any material gain we possess in this life. Our wealth here is prone to collapse and failure. That which is done for Christ will last throughout eternity. If we use our gifts and blessings to honor the Lord and serve Him, great dividends will be paid in eternity.

C. The Representation (35b) – Paul quoted a statement made by our Lord. His words are verified not only because He is the living Word, but through His actions as well. Christ came to earth as a humble babe, not to be served by others, but as a servant to men. He did not come to condemn humanity, but to give His life the atoning sacrifice for our sin. Christ freely gave so the sinful and needy could receive. He set the supreme example for sacrificial giving. **2 Cor.8:9 – For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich. 2 Cor.5:21 – For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. Phil.2:5-8 – Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: ^[6] Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: ^[7] But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: ^[8] And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.** If we are to have the mind of Christ, we must be willing to give of ourselves for the benefit of others. We are never more like our Lord than when we love as He loved, a love that compels us to give!

Conclusion: I hope this passage has challenged our hearts and motivated us to give as unto the Lord. While we need to be willing to give monetarily, our giving is never limited to financial gifts. We must be willing to give of our time, talents, and resources for the glory of Christ. If God has blessed you with the ability to give, you are truly blessed. Again, consider the words of Jim Elliot – *He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.*

Are we giving our all to Christ, or just a meager portion? Has the Lord spoken to you in regard to your willingness to give? Have you received the gracious gift of salvation provided by the atoning sacrifice of Christ for our sin? If there are needs to burdens, come to the Lord today!